To worship and adore.

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To worship and adore.

by The_Little_Rat

Summary

Will Graham thought he was having a decent life. His books are best-sellers and no one bothers him.
He thought that the simple life he always prayed for was coming to him until "he" came into his life.
A series of letters and tableaus will take him into the rabbit hole of his perdition where Wonderland doesn't seem like he has dreamt it to be...

It looks better.

Notes

I whish this is good to kill time. Not grate or completely bad but something enjoyable.
I mention Beau Graham every now and then, and my writing style might not be the best.
I'll put TW when the mentions of Suicide come.
This is my first try of a formal fanfic that I'll try to continue, so BARE WITH ME. ❤️ Enjoy, and tell me what you think.
(If you find something that must be changed, tell me so I won't repeat the mistakes)

Enjoy.

Adagio for Strings, Op. 11.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the rain stops falling outside the car, the last drops crash against the windows to start chasing each other down. It's the second rain in weeks, barely potent as a squall to even wet the profundities of the ground, he can't even imagine the flowers being thankful for such petty watering. In fact, he can't even imagine anything at all. Whilst he is looking at the droplets splashing and running along the cold surface, his mind is rather lost in the call he got minutes after the interview his editor forced him to do with some frivolous magazine. Neither of his two appointments today were what he considers the best way to spent the last day of weekend, over all considering that his former superior is his next date.

In his years of having faithful fans that followed him around, he learned two things: one, that there are a lot of joyful people with weird internet browsers, and two, that there are a lot of weird people with weird internet browsers. The last ones, his editor told him once after receiving his first «admiration gifts», are the worst of the worst. They go from letters written with menstrual blood to death threats against him for killing their beloved character, and contrary to the first type of fans who joke about it, the second ones have the stupid confidence to actually see their murderous wishes coming to life.

However, *he survived them*, he published his books under an alias, and he made sure that *no one* told his true identity to the world. He lives as a hermit inside his house, and he doesn't have to any social media or goes to any event where he has to show his face. He doesn't search his name on the internet under the orders of his editor, and to cool her worries, he is too afraid of what he would find there. He doesn't even like to watch the news, *he never does!*

And although he believed he was doing fine with the things his editor or others told him that his fans do for him, he is about to find out that building altars in his name is the most ordinary way one can show their admiration for him.

Will glances at the driver for the second time since he climbed in the car. A man hard to read. He drives with mechanical movements in complete silence, almost like an automaton made with the sole purpose of transporting people to their destinies. Will likes people like him. They don't force him to have conversations about family issues or his opinion of every single thing going wrong in the world. Yet there is just one issue with them–he believes.

They can be good killers too.

Methodical, clean, non-dependent of weapons or their strength… they don't kill near home even if it makes them travel into another state to indulge in their nighttime habits. They aren't impulsive, could be considered good employees and great friends to keep the charade of being a good person. He might as well provoke fires to help extinguish them as a hobby.

He is the type of person one sees on the T.V. and says: *«Oh! But he looked so normal!»* or *«I always knew there was something wrong with him. All that seriousness was ominous.»*

Will turns his face to the window before the driver can look at him through the review mirror.

At 18:30 pm. Will Graham walks out of the car after paying for his trip and goes into the building that towers in front of him like an impenetrable fortress, his heart flips with distress.

Someone already waiting for him in the entrance. A pretty girl, short brown hair tied in a high ponytail, white skin, dressed in dark khaki pants and a deep polo shirt. Her uniform as her standing posture demonstrates cleanliness, rigor, dedication and confidence; all necessary to have when one is putting their lives in the fire line. There is no doubt that she is a trainee sent to inspect him and take him through the installation's halls.

If she knows who he is, or if she is trying to satiate her academical curiosity with him, it doesn't matter to him. He is well used to being a rat lab for students and professionals who think to know about him.

They don't exchange many words aside from the usual greetings and to inform him that he will be taken to one of the interrogation rooms. As soon as she says her name, it is archived in some deep place of his mind where it will never come out, in other words, he forgets it.

The big corridors welcome him to a world he fervently hoped to avoid–staunch, flawless, and chillingly unwelcoming. The bustle from the people coming and going only amplifies the great pressure forming in the pit of his stomach *(some of them standing, some of them turning, all of them watching, all eyes on him)*. It's an akin desire the expulse his breakfast and the two mimosas he previously drank, but having an impediment to empty himself no matter how deep he pushes his fingers down his throat.

Shelves and doors and frames and paintings and people lose their shapes into watercolor stains that mix together, adding more dizziness to his previous state. Each step drags him further into a realm of melting figures whose dirt swirls around his feet to stop his walking.

He imagined returning to the place only in death, laid out on a cold medical table for examination. The many memories attached to this exact corridors and walls oscillate between the painful or pleasant experiences he shared with his coworkers in the meantime working there. Concentrating, he can almost sense the fetid odor oozed by the corpses mixed with the disinfectant lingering in the air as he sits in front of the most recent victim.

Or the sounds in the classrooms of his students coughing or sneezing accompanied by the rhythm of tapping of keyboards and the scratching of pencils on paper. The projector displaying evidence, warming his face as he stood behind the podium, incapable of seeing the attentive stares of his pupils thanks to its blinding light.

Will misses being a teacher. Will does not miss being an investigator.

He enters the little room when the trainee opens it for him. Gray paint covers every corner of the room giving the space a haunting appearance, the table on the center has on it a medium-size tape recorder turned off, on his right is the glass where he can see his reflection perfectly

standing by the door. The trainee's mouth moves but no sound is processed by his ears, she leaves him alone when there isn't an answer coming from him.

A he sits in the chair that faces the door, Will rearranges his reading glasses and cleans it from the fog formed with his elevating body temperature. Minutes pass in which he remains absent of thoughts or sounds that could make him break under the merciless pressure it applies on his shoulders. Guilt and responsibility sit each one in their proper places over him to force him to remember how to act in moments like this.

The chair does nothing but to freeze his ass and bring him the discommodity that keeps him attentive to the real realm. Will draws senseless figures on his trembles legs creating with it a symphony of murmurs synchronized by the rushing beat of his heart, irreligious ode orchestrated by his anxiety.

In the superficial side of his mind he is completely aware of his innocence, his isn't here to declare a crime or to be active part of the investigation. Will didn't put his hands directly on the flesh of the victims, he just authored a silly story that ended having recognition and a fame bigger than he can handle. If he is guilty of something is for creating a monster in paper, not the one who is now terrorizing the streets.

He gave the gun and bullets to the murderer; the choice of shooting was made by *them* alone.

So the burden is not here because he feels guilty, *(he feels bad for the victims, there is no doubt on that)*, but because he doesn't want to see the familiar face of someone he had been avoiding arduously all this time.

In exactly forty minutes after his arrival, the sound coming from the door catches his attention. Will lets go of a deep exhalation unconsciously and forcefully retained in his lungs.

The creak of the open door announces the entrance of a man, his dark skin glows pale under the dim light in the room and his figure once robust now appears slenderer than the last time they were together. The shadows on his face accentuate the contours and wrinkles of his face making him look older than he actually is. Or maybe is Will and his mind comparing Crawford with the last image he has of him. Stress and pressure are unmistakable; his job sucked the life out of him once Will went away from his hold.

The exchange of glances is broken firstly by Will, it gives him the time to recognize more details into the sharp, tired eyes of his former boss. Is evident that neither of them has slept for a long time and judging by the length of their beards, taking care of themselves is now the last of their worries. The mutual sharing of distress–different as it can be for each man– emphasizes the damage they have done to each other.

Nothing has changed.

Crawford sits in front of him, hands holding four different folders with similar thickness each. There is no need for him to show the images, Will's mind is already projecting in the shape of ghosts he doesn't want to see. His mind revokes the prototypes once created to be printed in the books.

The imaginary feeling of his hands cutting someone's air flow, characteristics smells of their blisters and sphincters relaxing after the brain stops commanding them to retain everything inside. Intrusive thoughts of him washing, dressing and posing his dolls in the perfect position to later show them to the world like the pretty art pieces they were. The lower part of his body bristles with excitement and horror when the flashes of his imagination come and go.

'This is about you and the books. You can at least come and answer some questions. I'm not asking you to get fully involved, Graham, but this was made for you!' He should have run the moment Crawford ended that sentence.

He is for Will what a farmer is for a lamb. Danger disguised as care. He is only feeding the lamb to eat it, just that the difference that puts Crawford as a cruel caregiver is the fact that he will cut pieces of the lambs meat to eat it slowly, and once it is dead, he will call a necromancer so the lamb's bones can keep *sacrificing himself in suicidal investigation by entering in killers heads so Crawford can DO A JOB HE CAN'T DO BY HIS OWN DESPTE OF BEING THE HEAD OF THE BEAHAIVIORAL ANALYSIS UNIT–*

In resume, Crawford is the type of man his father told him to stay apart. Nothing good can come from those who can't understand when enough is enough.

The old man swallows with difficulty before displaying some documents over the table with mastered practice, the pictures are kept inside their folders.

"Is good to see you again," Crawford says, his voice raspy and low with a glimpse of genuine relief he can't hide. Will nods slowly. "I hope it was on different circumstances."

"*Your* circumstances are the reason why we are here now, Jack. *My* circumstances, however, are more enjoyable because they consist of not being here." Will answers sharply. He hates there aren't more things to see on the room so he can concentrate onto them.

"Well, you'll have to start enjoying *my* circumstances if you want to make this fast and go home to *your* circumstances." He makes a brief pause that Will is not willing to fill with banal conversations. Nor with more discussion about how he is a liar and there is no way Will can do something *fast to go home* when they are near each other.

Will watches thanks to the mirror how Crawford pushes the documents towards him, an attempt to make him pick them. The medical reports shine under the light to the point he is not capable of recognizing the letters on them, like sunlight reflecting over snow, it is blinding. Like sunlight in a hot day of summer, Will wants to hide from them.

Soon, he turns to see Crawford taking out material left on the folders and the whiteness of the sheets is obscured by the photos placed over them. There are four of them, one for each victim. Will closes his eyes before the images can get tattooed into his eyelids; he doesn't have the guts to face them with all the guilt making him feel that he is the murderer of those souls. He wants to throw up when a new wave of anxiety shakes his system.

He isn't guilty, he didn't shoot them, but why in the first place was he giving a gun and a bullet to anyone? Even a child would have shot for the mere necessity to satisfy their

curiosity. Until now he was trying so hard to convince himself that it was all a bad dream, with the pictures being the slap he needed to return to Earth.

His books got people killed! Not his hands holding a gun, not his own weird ideals, not his duty as an agent, but *his books!* Is like giving the command from a throne and just waiting for his warriors to do something, and it feels million times worse than doing it himself. One: because is just a book; two: because it could have been avoided; three: because the crimes were supposed to spend eternity as fiction; and four: because they are dangerous, and he knows what it means to have his art replicated.

And yet, the tickling sensation of curiosity does not disappear no matter how much repulsion he can feel. It runs from his low back to his nape uncomfortably as it tries to make him turn his head and see the direct consequences of his actions, of his talented mind for murder; his own opuses are standing in front of him for the moment he is ready to accept their beauty and not be terrorized by their existence. Will killed them once, in his mind, how hard is to accept them in real life? So what if someone admires him with such perversion? At least the blood is not in his hands.

The impulse makes him surrender under one simple conclusion: *look because you created them, look to stop him*. He's done it a hundred times before; this is another case to the pile of folders. The only thing different is that he doesn't need to stay for the entire show, he knows how it will end.

"Is this rutinary interrogation, or do you need me to profile for you?" Will's flat voice comes out directly from his lungs like a murmur. If Crawford wants his career to keep going he will be wise to only choose the first.

"If you can do both things it would be for the best." Crawford responds with a severity that tells Will he is, in refined words, *fucked*. The duet finally begins, the spectators await in silence. "June 7, at 18:23 hours. Case AD45. This is Agent Crawford interrogating Will Graham as a suspect for the murders associated to «The Artist's Copycat» name given in association to the protagonist of «Midnight Myths»."

"You didn't turn on the recorder." Will says when he doesn't hear the buttons being pressed, trying to distract Crawford and delay the interview.

"Mr. Graham. Do you know why you are here?" He asks and ignores Will, too long being together is easy to know when Will is trying to avoid something.

Will exhales loudly *(so Jack too stupid to choose only the second option)*. There is no use to speak loud and clear if he isn't being recorded, Will answers. "Yes. I'm here to discuss the case according to what was informed to me."

He was most of the time there to discuss murders and murderers. Sometimes, he was there to discuss his innocence as well.

'You get too involved.' Alana said once, *'One day you'll be there confessing something more than «accidents».'*

“What is your relationship with this case?”

He hates rutinary questions because they put him on the spot light.

Rutinary questions also make him feel that his answers are wrong. Faked. Practiced. Say enough, not a lot and not too little; do opportunistic pauses, like you are remembering something; create a time line hard to change so your answers won't fluctuate when overtell; and most important: live a life with them so they can see that you are different, that way they won't force you to look them in the eyes. Will Graham, the eternal actor. *(Being so self-conscious of his flaws makes him feel like a robot faking being a human at times. He just wishes they won’t find the operator of such a strange machine).*

“I wrote the books that might have served as inspiration for the killer.” He answers quietly. He is thankful that it is Crawford the one in the room with him, he is not sure if there is someone on the other side of the mirror, though.

“So you don't have any other direct connection with the murders or the murderer.”

“Nope.” He pops the ‘p’ softly.

“Mr. Graham. I understand that you published your books under an alias. Who knows you are the real writer? Did someone watched you work on them before?”

“My wife, my editor, my publisher, Beverley Katz, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller and you. Most of the time my editor and my publisher are the ones solving any problems related to my work, and I don’t grant interviews personally unless there is assurance that my identity will be protected, or if the questions are given to my editor beforehand.”

“Why did you chose to use an alias?”

Will takes his time to consider his answer. “I wanted to publish my books; I just didn’t want the attention.”

‘I didn’t want them to find out who I am.’ Is left unsaid.

Crawford nods. “I need you to look at these pictures of the victims. Tell me if you know them, if someone you know knows them.” Will doesn’t make an intent to open his eyes until the man says: “Don't worry, they're alive in these.”

Slowly, he opens his eyes into a world of blurry visions and phantom shades of gray. He looks at the glass on his right first to recognize correctly the man sitting on his chair, his expression however is a mix of senseless spots easily vanished with the monochromatic room. He only knows he is there because of the blue flannel and because of his position on the room.

His eyes and those of the man in the reflection become comfortable with the light until they can finally understand the emotions that encompass them. Fear. Nothing more than that.

The ball of emotions controlling his movements are now sunken on the bottom of a lake ruled by pure fear. To see, and to be seen. He is aware that at any given moment the lake can

become an ocean whose strong tide could elevate the distress hidden in the deepest sand if he looks at them abruptly, yet nothing he does to keep the water serene helps; he is not comfortable with himself, he is not comfortable with Crawford being there, he is not comfortable with his creation «living», and he is not comfortable with the other outside of the Gessel Chamber.

The Will on the reflection seems to doubt before the real Will turns to look at the photos with his best poker face. The pictures look back at him. A blonde woman and three brunette people pose on their own pieces of paper with the simplicity one can only offer to pictures done by friends.

Three of them look oddly familiar to him, different from the pictures he had in mind when he described them, but still close to looking like the victims he described in paper. He did have the expectation to find perfect molds of his words staring right at him as if the universe created them with the sole purpose of being used for Will's and the murderer's intentions. Then he could have said that he did know them, he brought them to life with his pencil just to be destroyed by a sword.

The dissonance of their faces and body shapes saves him from getting into an uncanny valley vision that he wouldn't have like to experiment with. In a general approach, details like the hair, age, sizes and eye colors are enough to make him link every victim with their corresponded «canvas», and with it he can start to see what could have make them think that this people were ideal for the show.

The only thing that doesn't make sense is the last victim–in the order Crawford accommodated them–a complete change on his description that one can't bypass for how oddly she looks in the gallery of bodies. The victim he described in the first book was supposed to look older, with white pale skin, blue eyes and red hair that looked like fire growing from her scalp.

Will recognizes her as an obvious mistake, a piece of a puzzle that doesn't belong to it yet gives sense to the whole picture on the table. Hair and irises dark as night, tan skin barely kissed by the sun and elongated eyes that give her an elegant appearance, crude changes to the original picture and a rude intervention the image in Will's mind. She is not «imitation» but remains as flattery itself over the others.

This impostor smiles softly at him from the paper; happy, full of life, in peace. A siren luring him to follow her to an ocean ruled by a feeling opposite to fear, his response is to force himself to stop looking at her before Crawford could even think Will is getting interested in the case.

"Never seen them." He gives Crawford a quick look so the man can know he is telling the truth. "I recognize *who* they are, or rather, *who* they are trying to impersonate. But I don't know them as real people."

In a quick, unfair and Machiavellian movement, Crawford puts the forensic pictures over the ones they are looking at. Will closes his eyes instinctively, again. "Four people disappeared from different places in the last five months. They were found dead all over Baltimore, one or two days after their abductions. Neither of them shared any physical, behavioral or social

traits with the others, and there's no direct connection between them. The only thing that they have in common is the book that you wrote, Mr. Graham: Galatea Wilks, 45, teacher at a prestigious high school.

“Her wife didn’t report the issue because she believed Galatea left as she usually did when they fought. She has a history of domestic assault that her wife never reported until we interrogated her, minor problems with some parents of her students, and she was put under arrest for battery and evading her arrest which resulted in her being tazed after she broke the nose of one of the police officers. She was posed as Botticelli's Venus down a bridge–”

“How did they recreate the shell?” Will interrupts his former boss to his own surprise. Behind his eyelids he can see the image coming to life. Shiny materials twinkling under the light of the morning sun and the medium long, blonde hairs moving with the breeze. The scene is romantic and surrounded by an ethereal aura that makes her shine like a real goddess. Galatea looks beautiful; pure. Not the type of woman with a thick record detailing her inhumanity.

The shell in his mind reflects the light to create a bright cloud at her feet worth of a divine shrine for her to use. A base made with carboard, lined with gesso, its inside painted white whilst the outside part was orange, all covered in resin, sanded and polished to make it look perfect.

Back at home is the one he made to experiment with the idea that his imagination gave him, it isn’t as good as the one he described, and it is now being used as a bed by one of the small dogs. The job of being used by something holy is the only thing that makes the shells similar to each other.

When he started writing the sequel to his book, Will discovered that for someone who does art about a murderer who does his own art, he barely knew anything about art. The picture of the dead woman was clear on his mind from beginning to end: her appearance, bits of her life history, name and occupation... now, imagining killing her was like breathing air, *(although he didn't like the idea of doing so)*. All it took was a simple deep cut on the nape so it could be covered with her hair, and the details about process flowed like the Pied Piper music through his ears.

But art? The materials and brushes?

Will is a fisher, just like his father was. All he does is lures and bone carving that doesn’t require a lot of hard work, at the beginning he considered ideal to use ribs like the structure of the shell. He then resolved that it would have been too much pressure for a beginner to eliminate the meat from the bone, to bleach the material and create the shrine in a lapsus of time smaller than the time it takes for a body to decompose. So it was his wife the one who solved the problem for him. It started as her new hobby and ended as evidence at a crime scene. She won’t be touching another bucket of resin in her life, that’s for sure.

“With clay, she was hanging from the bridge so her weight wouldn't break the shell, her feet connected to the bottom with wires. Her internal organs were removed in totality and replaced with viscoelastic foam. All cuts were made with medical precision. They added extensions of hair to her, *three* feet long of *real* human hair. Apparently, someone decided to

experiment with your instructions." Crawford answers sarcastically, and Will frowns offended by the assumption that his book is a cookbook for serial killers.

He is not wrong, though. Will did make sure to explain in detail the process to build the shell. Out of curiosity, he saw pictures from other artist recreating them when his editor told him about it, and some of his fans even started to sell them as ornaments. Different sizes, different colors, some of them even took more creative liberties to personalize their shells. *(That was the type of people he liked, the ones who would recreate his art without the corpses included)*.

This special shell was beautifully made to express the elegance only an experimented artist can ad to their work. Months over months of dedication to get the best results and finally the ideal one was set into the canvas to show Venus the dedication she deserved, yet the Venus that now stands over it is dirty, lacerated, ugly. Attention can be easily drag to the clay ornament on her feet so she–as beautiful as she was supposed to be–was nothing but the imperfection placed to guide the eye to what truly mattered. It is a message for both victim and writer.

Galatea was ugly, something merely functional as mannequin to elevate the real piece of art on the canvas. For the killer, she was just part of the show because they needed someone to humiliate, someone to use and because the shell required a Venus to be over it.

To the writer it said: dedication. They are willing to spend time and materials to create art worth of Will's attention, Galatea is insignificant, but the shell… that same shell that took Will months of experiments and failures, that is what matters the most. They understand his frustration, they want to understand how Will saw his work once it was finished and doing it from a material different from the ones Will used, is another way to signal authenticity. They are different from all the other imitators doing Will's shell.

Just because it was only for Will to admire.

Will wants to see and verify if the differences are as abysmal as he sees them. If they truly project what his mind is telling him.

Crawford continues after not receiving an answer from Will: "Amanda Collins, 34. André Laurent, 57. In Bed: the kiss, by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Their torsos were the only thing found on the scene, covered in an old duvet; pillows and mattress filled with hair. We are still trying to process the DNA from them. They were found in an old building by some teenagers doing explorations. The murderer stitched them together so the kiss wouldn't disappear." *'That's not how I wrote it.'* Will doesn't tell Crawford. There it was again, the need to open his eyes and look at the massacre someone did to his job.

"She had her own business doing pottery, it had a downfall when people learned she was a scammer who stole thousands of dollars, that's why we suspected that her former clients were related to the case. However, we found no one of interest who could give us any clues, all suspects have verifiable alibies." The old man adds. "He was the manager of the Coeur de Notre-Dame theater company, he made friends with the wrong people as long as it meant making money and putting the company into a new show. He was responsible for the disbandment of the company two years ago because he was using it to traffic people to the best bidder."

'Perfect for each other,' Will thinks.

“Your «Artist» is some kind of vigilante?” He says mockingly.

“It was a possibility until *this*.” Crawford answers and points to the last woman. Will only hears his thick finger tapping over the young woman’s face. “Tsubame Aikawa, 45, Gabriel Rossetti’s La Ghirlandata. Her dress and shoes were bespoke by a famous brand in Sweeden; the harp was custom-made in Italy; the custom-made bracelet on her wrist is pure gold by Cartier. All bought under her name before she disappeared. The flowers on the instrument and the rest around her were fresh cuts, forensics say that she was likely killed yesterday morning although her disappearance was in January.

“She was just a waiter, did some caritative work and she was known as a hero in a lot of places like hospitals and shelters built for any cause, over all if they deal with kids; she was loved by her coworkers and bosses. The investigation of her disappearance had a lot of pressure on the police and the media, they had been making campaigns to find her since January. Found her on an old store, with a few cameras or security around the zone so there is nothing against the culprit. Just her heart was taken from her; she is also the only one to have a wound on the right eye going all the way to her brain.”

‘Lobotomy?’

“Maybe someone found something wrong with her.” Will concludes. *‘How does a waiter afford so much to buy imported and custom-made things? And why was her the only one with that privilege to die beautiful?’*

“Maybe.” Crawford takes out another couple of pictures. The ones from the crimes scenes. Will is still refusing to see.

“Am I suspect of murder or helping with the case?”

“Where were you on January 8?” Crawford avoids the question once more.

“At home with my wife, probably.” Will answers, defeated.

“Can she rectify it?”

“I said probably. But I was definitely at home. If I was alone or not, I can’t remember. You can still ask her.”

“Where were you on March 22?”

“At a bar, I think. Ask the bartender. She knows me.”

“And on June 5?”

“I had a Playdate with my editor, Georgia Madchen.”

Crawford stares at him with a frown. It deepens the marks on his face. It’s clear by the tone of his voice that he gets a double meaning on it.

Will doesn’t care if his wife is out there listening or if Crawford is going to run and tell her about his «love affairs». The woman is so in love with Georgia she wouldn’t dare to think wrongly about her.

“What's a Playdate?”

“Is what we say when we have to talk about my books or any issue with interviews or other events.”

The man nods slowly. Still doubtful of Will’s loyalty. “Do you have any idea of who could've done this? A letter, unwanted mail?”

Will shakes his head before exhaling loudly. “Since I write in anonymity, I never receive mails or gifts, the editorial does but they just give me the good ones, the rest they throw them away or they contact the police if they consider it properly.”

Crawford doesn’t ask anything else; Will opts to play the same stoic game. The heavy tension built around both men is part of an unspoken agreement that neither of them will break if they want to win. Crawford fighting for a killers and Will fighting for his liberty. They both bare their necks for the other to cut in as a sign of submission and control. Will, however, is tired of having his nape metaphorically cut by Crawford like many times in the past where he just sat to accept commands. Determined to take the lead on this tango dance, his only option is to find refugee on his mind.

This is the key point in their «fight» of interests, who has the chain and who is the dog can only be decided by how hard they are willing to bite the other to elevate the status, the trainer than will do as he pleases to do with the dog, never fully trusting the muzzle that once burrow its teeth in tender flesh.

On the dark void that forms behind his eyelids, Will patiently awaits for Crawford to surrender into desperation and the agreements established after Will’s dismissal; for once he is supposed to not bend the rules to his favor. At the same time, the young man prays for intervention granted by anyone aware of this arrangement– his wife could appear there to save him, or one of Crawford’s superiors could appear and scold him for bringing Will back to the installation when they made it clear that he didn’t belong there.

Well, to be precise, they said that it was unwise to let him prowl around while refusing to have the assistance he needed to keep his mind in a state safe for him and his companions, *(but it did feel like being rejected by «the cool kids»)*. Instability only works for those who are being chased, not for the ones chasing.

When Will had his last day at Quantico he explicitly stated he didn’t want to have Crawford near him unless one of them was on their death beds. Crawford reluctantly agreed to preserve last bit of respect Will felt for him. What Will didn’t see were the crossed fingers behind his former superior’s back. Therefore, unless they were in a different reality and Will wasn't Will, nothing would stop Crawford from stalking and chasing him until Will doesn't have any other option but to *look* and catch the killer.

Perhaps, in a funny twist of events, something weird enough to shock them might happen. An animal entering the room causing great damages could be ideal, it'd force them to evacuate giving Will the perfect opportunity to run out of Crawfords claws. With his eyes closed, he imagines the creature breaking the glass, shards of dust and glass fibers twirling around, a sharp fragment launched in great acceleration piercing Crawford's carotid to paint the world with a crimson fountain.

As he walks on the hall of his memories and imagination, Georgia makes act of presence in front of him. Eyes gleaming with emotion, cheeks and nose flushed with a pale pink color that made her look so alive.

'It must feel like love, to be killed by your own creation.' She told him one day when they were discussing some books to take as a reference for the sequel. He didn't listen to most of the conversation, but that little part hung onto him like a mantra he can't avoid repeating every now and then.

Is not like he wants to find dead on the arms of his creation, or that it would feel lovely to meet them. Through the history of men playing God by fabricating monsters, neither Will nor Victor Frankenstein can love an abominable error product of their solitude. Yet, despite the fear they can feel when watching the metamorphosis of a diabolic creature, there is some peculiar sense of pride shared by these spurious Gods when they feel the pulse running through their creatures.

Will wants to see his own design unwrapping before his eyes like the gift it is, *touch* the fine materials and *conserve* the canvas on a hidden place of his memories to remember what he is capable of without staining his hands. To be slain by them can sound romantic if it comes with the suicidal pact of dying in each other's embrace, but to think about coexisting in harmony with it briefly as it could be, makes him want to meet them.

Denying he isn't interested in looking at the victims, particularly at the Japanese girl, is part of doing the right thing that feels inherently wrong, like a good medicine which flavor is a burden to the taste buds fighting against a flu. It may not be what he wants but it keeps him from falling into the tentation of doing things he might regret later.

Will needs to escape.

Crawford drums his fingers against the table, rushing him to see.

Taptaptaptap.

To give Crawford what he wants will be like giving them what they want. Recognition. A way to enter in Will's life like a maggot looking for a place to become a fly.

Taptaptaptap.

Surely, he has done this a hundred times before. Pointing with his nose to the place Crawford must aim and receive few pats on the head for a good job as he hides the disgust provoked by watching the rabbit die–whether it is repulsion against himself for enjoying it or repulsion for seeing a life end, is up to the parts of his brain that can't comprehend one another. This

doesn't have to be different from the others, at the end of the day he will deal with whatever he «brings from the other side» if it means saving people, avoiding murders. Be a good man.

Taptaptaptap.

But this isn't like the others, is it? Because no one has admired him like this before.

'The faster the better.'

When he opens his eyes the first thing he can capture is Crawford's posture changing on the chair from something tense into complete relaxation, is a subtle movement that anyone could misinterpret, not Will, never Will. To read Crawford is an art learned over years and years of extremely care, for Will is like walking on the same house and knowing the best way to walk, to close the cabinets, to sneak out. Sometimes the old man feels so much like home Will sometimes see his father on his shouts and the tension of his jaw. Both men always glad that Will is finally in his right mind to do what is correct and die for what is best.

The process of looking down takes time, preparation. His lungs inflate and deflate twice before he can submerge into the turbid ocean, its algae made of human arms and hair trying to reach out for him and drag him to the pit, swimming in a liquid as thick as gelatine is hard thanks to the thousands of tendons, cartilages and bones decomposing. He hadn't seen a body since his last day at the FBI, and he was planning to not see another for the rest of his life, now he is obliged to look at four.

This introduction between monster and creator begins with a step over the dock; the second step is bigger, half way closer to the end; the third puts him near to fall with the edge burrowing on the soles of his feet. The man looks down to the viscous liquid, he can almost see his reflection over the steady surface that awaits for him to jump. The process of baptism takes time, preparation, a blank mind so thinking can be easier.

From behind we see him with his back turned to the safe shore he loves. It all happens in a flicker; there he is and the he isn't.

Will looks at the new souls floating on the Cocytus, three cry and one of them dances like a nymph returning home. The lacerations on their flesh shine in a fiery red that tints the water on swirls that only the nymph enjoys. She is where she belongs as well as her heart, she is not worried about swimming on the river for eternity because she is aware that she won't be there long. Not like them.

They are despise and contempt and repulsion, condemned by a God to cry and hold onto each other to find the comfort that their cold limbs can't provide them. Mutilation for them is a punishment, for *her* is a promise.

Each medical report is read twice by attentive eyes that don't dare to avoid any detail. Medical execution, alive on the moment of extraction, no signs of physical assault or fight, they are all clean of any speck of dust that could provide a place, a clue. Is a perfect procedure done different from the mess Will had in mind when his fingers were tapping vigorously on the computer. His hand reaches out for the folders with the last pictures, the real designs.

Venus looks ugly over the shell she puts her feet on, undeserving to be there. The hair falling like a waterfall around her is damaged by the bleach they–no, not they, *him*–used to match the color of someone else's hair to the one growing on her head. The big cut on her abdomen travels from the sternum to the low part of her belly, giving protagonism to the stiches hidden under her skin. No longer a Goddess but a used doll that still conserves some beauty yet can be forgotten on the bottom of the chest.

The lovers are pieces. Contrary to the characters killed with bullet to the heart for poetic purposes. The duvet is common, bought in some garage sale around the globe. In this painting the victims have the headlights, hairs brushed to make them shine. They look comfortable even with all eyes on them; despite being incomplete they are one, joined forever by threads. He put make up on them to make them glow like real love paints the lovers' cheeks. It's a cozy portrayal of the ideal couple on a warm Sunday morning, they may not have the best pillows or the best sheets, but they have each other.

Jane, on the other hand, is perfect in every sense.

No, the comparation with Jane is a mistake by the heretics that can't see her as her own religion. This isn't Jane but Tsubame. A Goddess brought to Earth as a gift herself. She was cared for, she was loved, but not in the same way Rossetti loved his muse. He took much care when he opened her chest and cut her heart out, he couldn't risk to ruin her. And she is happy to be there, on the box for Will to hold and take home. Killer and victim passed the last minutes of her life contemplating into the other's eyes.

'Finally.'

Abysmally different and so similar at the same time.

That is not *«The Artist»*, *his «Artist».* What his character did on those innumerable pages couldn't be compared to the paintings in front of Will. *Those* were pieces of art made by a broken ego that tried hard to be recognized, Queen Bee, Artist wannabe. *These* are adoration, calls for attention and notice. In essence they share similar traits, paint and technics but the message is something different, like a sentence used two times at different points on a movie–meaning changes every shade of color on a canvas.

Will swims to the safe shore of his imagination before he can remember how to speak again. "This is a gift."

Crawford looks to the mirror with the confidence one has of knowing where are the observers' eyes. "We already knew that."

"I don't mean it as the letter or the flowers you leave on the table of the girl you like; this is more like the shrine you build on one dark room of your house. *This* is adoration at its finest." He isn't blushing but he surely feels warm. "He is in complete control of what he is doing; every detail, movement, shape… all so his creation could live up to the expectations and his needs. It is a show. To him this is serenate under the balcony at midnight. He doesn't care about them and the state he presented them, they are just dolls made to wear the clothes he designed for them. There is no respect for them, removing their organs is part of it. He might have also take the medical trophies as a personal signature, after all, *my* killer never

mutilated the bodies. To my killer the preservation of the bodies was important, to *your* killer the message is what matters,"

"And what is the message?" Crawford's voice comes out of his throat like ice. Whether it was from the cold that ran through his spine due to fear or the gelid sensation he felt on his guts due to his anger, is up to discussion.

Not to Will, though. Crawford reflects his father more when he is scared by his deductions.

"You already know that." Will grins, both brows rise with incredulity. "He wants to be notice by me. That is why making a spectacle out of their death is better than attacking my wife or attacking me. He wouldn't kill me, or at least not now."

"Shall we put cars outside your house?"

Will shakes his head.

"Nobody would know if it were him. He still looks human, not something with feelings but something that is so close enough to us he can comprehend the way we behave. He'll find the way to blend in and approach me when we least expect him to." *'I may invite him in.'* To dodge the thought Will bites the inner side of his cheek until a miniscule part of skin comes down. He swallows it. "But like any other murderers there will be something that'll make him fall from his pedestal."

"Like Tsubame? Why change her? Why didn't she received the same treatment as the others?" Crawford pulls up the girl's photo so Will can see her perfectly.

Will takes her with delicacy and softness. Tsubame is indeed mystery reincarnated, her connection to the case is odd enough to even consume him into the game. Had Crawford taken him to the scene, Will would have jump head first into the pool of blood without thinking.

In the picture, Tsubame looks like a real royal and more alive contrary to her similar–if it weren't for the lack of light on her eyes, he would have thought she was still breathing. Galatea was filled like a teddy bear and Amanda and André lost every half of their bodies, but Tsubame was treated with so much respect. *He* had to honor her in the best way *he* knew.

The report said that her face was covered in soft make up and her nails were painted, and by the picture he could tell all surrounding her was beautiful and shiny. Tsubame looked pretty with her stiffen hands and her sight lost into the other world. More than a victim of a cruel person, she looks like a tragic death occurred to women in classic literature, immortalized in a taxidermy that pretends to keep her as the work of art she is.

From another perspective, he thinks is unfair that only she got to have so much consideration. With his mother dead he learned that women deserve to die looking pretty and not in hands of someone with so much hate.

"She was *someone* to him. Is not like he loved her romantically but at least he appreciated her enough to not destroy her. She feels sincere and honest… genuine. Like this is his true

essence. He is not only making a shrine, but he is also showing that he is willing to sacrifice piece of his heart for what he thinks is *love*. They all share something in them that speaks love and hate." Will takes the photos of the other victims and puts them on one side of the table, the pictures of Tsubame stay on the side contrary to the others three. "She is not a mistake, not to a man who even went as far to grow his own flowers to avoid being recognized if he bought them. Through all his perfection and his care for details and his delicate strokes, you can *feel* his hate for *them*, his contempt. But Tsubame… she was someone to him."

With a deep inhalation Will comes out of his zone, he didn't realize he was even swimming back in when he stared at Tsubame and her cold eyes. His heart is calm as well as his respiration, suddenly any trace of incommodity he could have been showing disappears and all that is left behind is an immense serenity as he floats on the surface, one of the poles on the dock hit his head. He looks away from the pictures again.

Will doesn't like this type of killers, the ones that are too passional about their works. They share their feelings so openly to the world and to him that they end up staying in his mind longer than usual. And that freaks the shit out of him because that is wrong. The type of wrong thing that feels right to do, not existing as his usual self but as something more *beautiful*.

"You know this isn't good for me." He says in a tired whisper.

"But you are good for this." Crawford assures him.

Will scoffs and does a feeble smile. "Well, drugs feel fucking amazing, however that doesn't mean I'm doing them on daily basis."

"These aren't drugs, Will. I know you don't like it, but you are good at saving people. Next time there won't be just four, next time he will complete the second book and God forbid us if he gets mad because there's no more. I need you to look before he can even attempt against you or your wife, don't you feel a little responsible for this?" He says in a calm and reflexive voice. A teacher scolding a student with compassion. But Will is not his student, he is just the poor sacrificial lamb who hates him the most.

"I do." His expression tightens with exasperation and offense. Confessing is what really ends the fight and Crawford cuts his neck with his sword–he wins. "I do and you know it, the worst of all is that you know that I feel responsible for this. *I wrote it, Jack*. I gave him a manual; I painted a mural for him to find inspiration. But I'm tired of you taking advantage of it, I don't want that anymore. I don't want to become this monster because I don't know what will happen to me. They fired me for a reason, and I was hoping it could stay like that."

Silence rules once more in the room, minutes pass as Crawford searches in his mind for other tactics to make him stay and Will just prays for someone to save him. He doesn't believe in God, or at least in the one from the books and Churches, but there must be something, something that explains why he is the person he is and why things happen the way they happen to him. The psychology theories and the damn DSM doesn't work for him, they never give him the minimum sigh of faith that in any moment he could be able to stop being… *Will*.

Crawford sighs resigned. “So I guess you wouldn’t want to look at the places for mere curiosity. After all this happened because of you. And I know Frankenstein should want to kill his monster.”

Will covers his mouth before he can even bite. The fact that Crawford was able to connect his own thoughts about monsters and mad scientists is what wakes up his interest again. Yes, yes he wants to look, he wants to look at least at one of them since the others are already on the mortgage and it has been months since the day the FBI found them. He stares once more at the last murder and the first disappearance; he looks at Tsubame.

Her skin looks healthy and fresh, the green fabric covering her body is a vibrant color that contrast with her skin color so graciously and wraps her on the right parts to make her look more elegant and ethereal, she lives loyal to the image of what Will imagined once even when she is not the expected model. No insect has made its way through her body and the pink petals of the flowers shine softly thanks to the reflection of the flash impacting against them. The engraved on the harp adds more elegance to the slim fingers that hold it. She seems to be sitting on a chair, a position hard to get from a corpse that has lost all control in her movements and force.

Will can’t help but feel respect and some kind of love in him filling his heart, it’s the killer emotion, he knows, but it feels so personal to him that is hard to avoid it. It makes him wonder how she looked when she was dying, color leaving her skin slowly and cold touching her body from the outside to the inside so slowly he would have stayed there until every inch and corner of her felt like ice.

“Just Tsubame, body and crime scene.” He says firmly after a little while. “Then I won’t be bother with this again.”

Will reads the medical report once more while Crawford takes him to the place. It’s an old, small store with red bricks and a counter in the back, the plastics and papers covering the windows were ripped out to let her exposed to the public eye. It’s been abandon for more than three years; the real estate salesperson found the body that morning when he went to give it a quick check before showing it to a few potential buyers.

He thought about the man, and the constant feeling of loss he might have felt when he realized the place was now catalogued as a crime scene and no one would be willing to buy it. People will probably tell him that it is okay, that those things happen once in a while, but he was brave to confront it and call the police. Then he will go home, take a shower and cry for hours until he falls asleep. He will take some days off of work and the next week he will be back, hoping there isn’t another body in the next house he is selling and praying to not be the next in line. If all in his head goes right, he would remember that life is short, and he needs to enjoy it; maybe he would start taking medications, go to therapy and find a way to be happy and leave in the past the haunting image of the mystical Goddess in the green dress. If nothing in his head is right… then there will be two bastards reviving the same memory over and over again obsessively.

Will just wishes the real estate agent won't try to occupy his place in the FBI now that he is not there to fill that space.

The stares of his former coworkers are stuck in him as he walks by. The night is warm despite the storm that just ended, small puddles of water attempt to splash their content on his shoes when he steps on them as some kind of revenge against him for contaminating them; there are no smells in particular, the city odors have been washed by the rain. That makes him miss his home, there the ground gets wet and muddy until everything smells nicely of petrichor, that's an aroma one can never forget nor hate–he believes. That smell has always accompanied him since he was little, it is comforting and full of a sedative capable of soothing his sorrows and worries.

One of the few perfect gifts live has given him to remind him that he is still human and worth of something… *anything.*

Inside of the place are just a few lights illuminating the room where Tsubame laid for the last twenty-four hours, there are no longer flowers or the essence of these flooding the room. He stands where her corpse was a few hours ago, marked with a big 'x' on the floor–a mark indicating where the hidden treasure is–, he somehow expected to see something more of the whole spectacle since the directives on Quantico denied him the entrance to the labs and mortgages, the rational part of his brain that was still working was glad they were thrown away as soon as Crawford registered Will in the system.

From the small, long windows on the top of the wall from the back he can see the sky, dark and mixed with a few remaining clouds from the previous rain. No stars shine up there, that makes him miss his home too. Sometimes staring into the empty firmament scares him, it reminds him of his insignificant existence and his ephemeral life, a little spot of dust in a big universe that couldn't care less about him and his problems, so ominous at times that he is sure some day it will announce unwelcome news about the beginning of the end of the world. *«Run, little ones. Hide, delicate beings. The night is about to fall over us, and the sun won't come out no more. May sweet dreams hold your hearts while doom condemn us all».*

The small fragments of sky seem to grow bigger and bigger, calmly approaching to him the longer he stares at them before a shadow appears on the corner of his eye, it is quick and just some inches smaller than him, but the movement is enough to take him out of his paranoia. Beverly is still nice and pretty like she has always been, her hair is shorter than it was three weeks ago when he last saw her. She is wearing her white lab coat and a hair clip keeps her neck bare.

She looks too comfortable for someone who just touched and opened the body of a woman. As usual.

They have been friends since he started working for Jack as a special agent, at first he wanted to reject her politely like he did with everyone else until one day he woke up in her coach with a cold towel on his forehead and a glass of water and some pills by his side. Since that breakfast they have been almost inseparable, she has strong boundaries like him so being together worked good for two people who preferred to be alone most of the time. Beverly says something funny, and he laughs; Will says something awful and she answers with something similar instead of running away.

It has been great being by her side and not feel judge even in his lowest; if one day he goes berserk he knows she won't do anything to save him and in addition to his condemn, Beverly will look for a way to have him dead because that will be preferable for Will if it means not becoming something wrong that felt right. She is his plan B.

"Old habits hardly die." He turns and grins to the woman beside him. She answers back with a beaming smile.

"Yeah, I do need to work better on my self-control. I'm tired of Jack shouting at me for taking you out of the «zone»." Her nose scrunches as she tucks a part of her hair behind her ear. "Came back for the *good thing?*"

"I'm an addict at this point." He jokes. "Just don't get used to me being here."

She nods, the smile she offers him is approving of his words. "You are always running away from me. But there will be one day that you won't be able to escape because I'll have you on my table, naked and open for me, baby."

Will laughs as low as he can, the tension from his shoulders disappears. He isn't fond of people who try to tie him down a chair for an hour and force him to talk about his deliriums, let alone the ones who want to break his cranial bones to see his brain. So, when he learned that he was actually happy to be around Beverly, the list of people he found tolerable grew larger, and he considered for a moment putting on his testament that Beverly had every right to take his body to the lab.

He can picture her genuinely happy as she cuts him open, there might be some sobs and whines, but they would be silenced by the exclamations of admiration coming from her discoveries. She would also lecture him about the importance of having a healthier diet to live a longer life.

"Well, before that happens I will take out the tattoo I have on my back so you can never see it."

Her eyes wide amused. She hits him softly on his shoulder with her palm. "You are an asshole."

They both look at the windows again, a big cloud has covered them to announce the approximation of another round of water for the night.

"Why are you here? Aren't you supposed to be on the lab with *those* two?"

She looks at him with a soft smile and crosses her arms in front of her chest. "A little bird told me you were coming here so I came to be you therapeutic assistant."

"Wow, so that means I'll go home completely turned into a *psycho.* My wife will be really mad at you from messing me up even more."

She hits him again. "Don't mention it, her face when she is mad is really scary. I can see why you like her; she looks like she could kill someone at any moment. Besides, I can be a good

service dog, you could need someone to help you escape from Jack."

His stomach squeezes inside him when he remembers why he is there, and the need to vomit comes to him like a violent tide. This is bad, bad, *bad*. He feels the urge to tell Beverly to take him out from there and help him escape to another country, he knows she would do it gladly.

"So, have you not started yet?"

"No, I'm waiting for Jack to take them out from here." He answers with a shaky voice that makes her grin in displeasure.

"Well, at least you won't be here long. You're not coming back, right?"

Beverly sounds worried about his next answer.

He wants to reassure her that he won't, but he can't. In some part of his memories he hears her lying to Crawford so he can sleep a bit more, he sees her driving in the middle of the night with him dying from fever on the back seat, he sees her dressed in deep blue on his wedding day, and over all, he sees her eternal frown of preoccupation decorating her face when she thinks he is pushing or punishing himself too much.

Will rubbed his eyes with desperation; what he wants to say doesn't come out of his mouth because he can't even promise to himself that what will come out of this experience won't change him entirely, that he will be the «same man» he has always been.

Before he can even say anything to comfort her Crawford is already calling everyone out, she gives him a quick, doubtful glance after telling him that she will be waiting outside for him. Beverly rushes her way to the exit, and he stays there alone, the low lights of the establishment illuminating him and his surroundings. They are too bright for his own perception.

Will turns around to make sure no one outside is near to the front windows to look at how he crumbles down on his own misery and fear. The pendulum swings every time he closes his eyes involuntarily, and he has to do replace that image with other thoughts before it can even begin to guide him to the other side. He counts to ten, he counts to twenty, forty, sixty, hundred… the room's cold weather embraces him from head to toe like if winter is earlier this year, the deafening silence from the street and the room builds a tomb that holds him down and tight into place, three sizes smaller with the intention to suffocate but not to kill.

On the back of the store is a closed door, surely guiding to another room and another door that gives welcome to the outside world, he thinks that it isn't late to leave and run as fast as he can to somewhere safe where Crawford won't look for him; all he needs is to give some big steps and take the doorknob on his hand, give to it enough pressure to make it turn and open his way to freedom.

If only his legs could do exactly what he is telling them to do.

Giving up is what he is good at, with a deep breath and his eyes closing synchronically, Will chooses to follow the lead and wear the skin of the devil in turn.

A pendulum lighted in hot red appears behind his eyelids warming the gelid sensation that froze his skin, if he is not careful enough it will incinerate him one of these days. To the swinging on his mind follows a wrapping sensation on his body, that lets him know he is back on the swampy ocean looking this time for a face not quite dead, not quite alive; the sentimental souls of murderers must be there too, lamenting the decisions made by their empty carcasses, compliant to tell him every secret they know in order to do something right for once.

Will is at home. The soft breeze outside tells him a storm is coming his way and he must hurry if he doesn't want the water to ruin his new acquisition. There is no trace of his dogs or his wife, the complete solitude gives him the confidence he needs to walk upstairs to the bathroom.

Frames and photos of him and his wife are lost, but that doesn't matter. He has never being married, nevertheless. That type of commitment is not something that he can easily concede to any person, much less now that he has found the person he thinks is worth the risk, he never imagined that someone like him could existed in the real world, someone capable of understanding what his paintings represent. He is curious to know if that person knows about the last ones, and what type of reaction did he presented after the discovery. Will definitely enjoyed them; they weren't exceptional, but the purpose is not always pretty.

Sacrifices must be made in order to achieve the greater good.

The man opens the bathroom door, and the image of a breathing girl welcomes him in. She looks at him, the expression on her face is hard to tell but what is sure is that she isn't afraid of him. There are no locks or chains keeping her in place and neither the cold water is enough to make her stand from the bathtub. Will smiles at her, with scalpel in hand and a new type of certainty he never experienced in his past life he walks to her and crouches by her side with slow movements.

He helps her to lay back and expose her chest to him. He doesn't look at her breast for respect to the woman he is holding, when he does, it will be because it is necessary to mark the beginning of his incision. For the next minutes he comforts her by brushing her long hair, the exact length he told her to grow it. They have a long history together; it is hard to tell how long they have known each other but the bond they created in that time has been worth it to this very moment full of appreciation and respect.

At some point he was going to use her for his greater good, what he didn't know yet was what exactly was that greater good, until him. He is the reason why he is glad to sacrifice a part of his, a part he treasured enough to keep her by his side but not enough to hold onto her forever.

Will takes his scalpel and takes it to her sternum adding the pressure he needs to separate the skin. It feels almost poetic when the scalpel finally touches the place where the heart is, the sharp edge slides in softly and quickly. An invisible orchestra begins their cathartic symphony when blood runs down their skin welcoming him into a world of pure Nirvana.

The composition is born in a slow tempo accompanied by a somber melancholy that feels perfect to the occasion as memories of their lives mixed «pass» through his eyes. It is a haunting melody that soon grows in strength to become powerful and beautiful and cathartic, serendipity found inside a bathroom in honor of the main inspiration that led to his momentum.

His skin crawls once he gets to see Tsubame's heart and the violins sing their highest chords with complete ecstasy; sorrow, longing and hope resonate across the canvas he is painting and the symphony he is hearing. The organ palpitates quickly, the fact that Tsubame has her brain pierced doesn't mean that she can't feel pain and that her heart won't pump fast as it tries to regularize it, it just means that she will be incapable of doing anything about it. He is saddened about it, thanks to the fact that she isn't able to enjoy their own duet, she can't comprehend the euphoria given by her blood running down her body and staining the water that makes her skin shine.

Beautiful mermaid, daughter of goddesses. Jewel sacrificed in the name of love.

Her heart is pulsing because of him, Tsubame's heart is out to the world to see because of Will, and his gift to keep and treasure is finally warming and wetting his hand as he holds it.

Will takes some scissors from the border of the bathtub and cuts the veins and arteries and vessels that hold the heart in place. Little by little the motion begins to fade and as he sees into his friend's eyes how the light extinguishes and travels to a far world that someday he'll meet too. Will perceives the last glimpse of her love being delivered to him.

When he stands up, he looks to his side to find the mirror and the reflection of a man he knows but can't recognize; a heart in hand and blood covering him aren't impediments to recognize the bliss that charms him.

It's wonderful. And it is his. And he is himself.

His design.

And he gives a beaming smile to his reflection, worth of the new life born in such a glorious day.

The symphony ends.

Will comes out of his trance in a deep inhalation that his lungs receive with desperation. His cheeks are stretched upwards due to the powerful smile that still illuminates his face. Three familiar faces are now standing in front of him with concerned expressions, they are analyzing him with wide open eyes that stare to the image of a man who appears to feel nothing but satisfaction with the murder he has just committed.

His join hands still seem to be holding the heart as if this were a piece of meat given to a hungry man. There's no blood lubricating arms, and the little crumbs of the hallucination are soon sweep away. The smile changes form to a silly, drunk grin full of immense pleasure.

Crawford is the one to catch him when he wobbles.

“How long has it been?” He manages to ask, his voice raspy and low. Will is panting softly.

“Almost an hour. We got worried when you didn’t came out.” Beverly answers. Intrigue and worry are mixed in her voice. She asks before Crawford can even open his mouth. “What was it like?”

Will gains composure again, he stands on his own two feet, eyes closed and focused on the last glimpses of emotion that come to him in high, warm tides. Breathing slowly has no use in helping him to relax. “It was– I don’t know. It isn’t something I have experienced before. The sensation of killing her is completely different from other killers, and I was– I was like… *God.* ” His sighs when the feeling overwhelms him again, making him tremble gently under its embrace. “It was like God.”

His companions don’t speak. They just wait for him to regain his normal, mournful state before interrogating him more. But he is not ready to detach from the dream, how is he supposed to say goodbye to life itself when he feels reborn? How is he supposed to get off of that boat that invites him so openly to travel a world of delights and wonders he has long forgotten?

“He knew her. They were close, not family but not friends or lovers either. It-it was affectionate like– understanding, at least superficial b-but strong enough to give their relationship a-any meaning.” His eyes meet Beverly’s. She frowns trying to make sense of his words. Will talks again after thinking a little further. “To him she was special, not like the person he loves, more like a pupil. He felt so much respect for her, he treated her with tender affection. He mutilated the other when they were alive, right?”

Beverly nods.

“But he couldn’t dishonored her like that, because she wasn’t like them.” His sight gets lost in the sky above them, the cloud has moved, and he is able to see the deep firmament staring back at him. Will thinks it looks smaller than before, less sinister. “She was like him.”

“A good person?” His friend asks mockingly with disbelief.

“A killer.” Answers the third person. It is a cold tone that shows her disappointment.

Will keeps the same drunk smile on his lips when he turns to face her, looking at any time to her left ear and the pendant on her lobed. Her blue eyes stare at him with an expression that he can’t quite understand because he is still too drunk in the killers elixir, but the voice is more than enough to comprehend her.

“They are playing to be humans as best as they can, he may had taught her that too. Why she let herself to be killed is something that I don’t know, but I do know that he was proud of her. And Tsubame was so special to him that he gave her the honor to be part of his tableaus, he gave her the honor to be part of his poem. And he loves the muse even more so that is why he decided to share part of his love with the person he loves. He kept her heart because he believes it belongs to him, after all, he put his love in nurturing her for the greater good.

“He will kill like this again until everything is completed, until the last note of his serenade is played, and *until he achieves what he wants.* But these aren’t his first victims. He will be hard to catch because he can change and mutate his M.O. as much as he wants to distract others. Highly intelligent, extremely controlling. He won’t stop, because everything will go his way despite risking his identity. One day he’ll appear, and we won’t notice.”

Crawford stops holding him when Will can finally stand by himself. The older man joins the two women in the line of the spectators as his brain works through the information Will just gave him. Will is sure that in his eyes, he looks senseless and insane. The reason why they fired him.

A big tide of excitement makes his body tremble with a chill that makes his skin crawl. He tries to remember himself that this is the exact *«wrong that feels right»* he is supposed to avoid if he wants to return home with his wife and his dogs, not submitting to the intrusive thoughts is what keeps his feet on the ground so he can be far from the reflector and the center of attention. He lowers his head and looks at Beverly through his eyelashes, she smirks with compassion and reassurance.

‘You’re not coming back, right?’

He is even less sure now. The magic of their eye contact is lost when Crawford talks, just then he realizes he has been staring at her without any problem. She notices too and smiles at that.

“Being with you is the *greater good*?” He finally asks with a sharp frown. His judgement pierces through Will’s guts.

Will looks at his wife. His Alana. Any time he is distracted by the case he forgets that she is there too, getting angrier with every second that passes. This time her eyes open so much he gets worried her eyeballs will fall from her skull. Alana pales, waiting for his answers despite knowing full well the answer.

When Will nods, she storms out of the store like a rejected heart after being dumped for someone else; there is no discourse about damaging Will and exposing him to something dangerous, no time to let her disgust and her offended words explode so the splinters can hit Crawford. Will hurries to follow her and Beverly walks behind them like a protective shadow.

She is escorting him to Alana’s car also uncaring of Crawford’s opinion about her insubordination or Will’s infantile reactions. Nothing matters but Will. Will and his magnet that attracts murderers, Will and his magic to inspire them, Will and his upside-down world. And to Will nothing matters but Alana and his house and his dogs and his need for attachment to reality that he doesn’t want to lose if Alana leaves him there.

Outside it pours, washing his and the murderer’s feelings away. The world moves in slow-motion, and sounds are muted by the own emptiness that his mind has created to protect him. Beverly walks passed him and rushes to open the car door before Alana can even think of abandoning him *(is not like she is capable of doing so, she loves Will, she is just mad. And*

Will is sometimes a little overdramatic. Either way, if she ever decided to dump him in the middle in the rain with all his dreams and his heart crushed, Beverly would take him home).

Beverly's eyes always glued on Will from the moment he enters until he is finally seated, if she says something to them, he doesn't listen. There is no space for others but him inside his safe bubble.

When his friend closes the door, he looks outside the window, Crawford is staring at him from the door of the establishment, deception and anger are draw on his face. He tries to feel a little upset for leaving him there, for not continuing in the work as he should have done but he already did his statement: Tsubame–as much as it pains him–is the last.

What is worse than feeling Crawford's bitterness is to know he has to sleep next to his wife's disgust–that if she even chooses to stay at home tonight. They don't leave immediately, and they don't dare to look at each other as they wait for, well, *anything*; is understandable, he reasons, she never liked the monsters he had to be when he used to work with them, even less the ones trying to fuck her husband.

Will wants to tell her that he needs her this night, just for this night, to feel that he is still the good man he has been working hard to be.

At the same time, he hopes this doesn't mean that he will be back in the interrogation room.

Chapter End Notes

I might change the name of the ff. I'll think more about it.
I wanted Will and Beverly to be best friends, this will be important for the future and the plot. Also because I love her.

I hope you didn't get tired of my descriptions, I'll do my best to get better :)

Ecclesiastes 6:6

Chapter Summary

Will starts to have a lot of internal issues with the recurrent memories and dreams involving certain woman; the beginning of an obsession begins, showing itself like a drug he doesn't want to consume yet it is forced to enter in his system. Would anyone notice he loves the gift someone gave him? What will happen once the dreams vanish?

TW: Suicide attempt, alcoholism.

Chapter Notes

I think that I wanted to show how Will's internal conflicts work, although I may not have done the best out of it. Also, the Will I want to write about is someone who is already questioning himself, someone who wanted to run away from the cases and the murderers because he was aware he was already becoming one, Hannibal is just here to give him a little push down the cliff and to show him that he can be lovable.
I know Will is not the kind of person that might have "friends" but (as I said in the previous chapter), I feel that people like Beverly were the ones who kept him in his right mind.

I also want to show what I think that would happen if Will and Alana got to be together, his empathy disorder can make him comprehend Alana and to even pretend to be "sane", but his dark tendencies will be part of his contradictions. (At least this is how I see him, am I wrong? I might be, so correct me if my mischaracterization makes Will a different man completely).

Won't say anything else, so
Please, enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I told him! *I told him that I didn’t want you there!* And you chose to go with him knowing what it does to you!” Alana growls at him on their way home. “We don’t know what might come home with you tonight!”

“Is not like I have rabies.” Will shudders on his seat, his forehead leaning to the cold window. “It was for the old times.”

“The old time–*Jesus, Will!* Have some respect for you. He gaslighted you into going there, again using the fucking guilt trips or whatever shit he used to convince you, and you simply said *yes!* Why can’t you keep yourself out of this? One would have suspect that after all this time you would’ve learned your lesson.”

“He didn’t used them. I chose to come with him.” He whispers to the window and creates a white layer of vapor in the crystal. He is tempted to draw a happy face in it.

“That’s even worse!” Alana hits the wheel with her palm for every word that comes out of her mouth.

Will agrees in his mind. Remaining in silence is the least he can do to thank her for taking him home though she is mad.

Someone on the left road makes a change of lights to them and Alana reduces her speed. An accident ahead leaves them another hour and a half with the incommodity of the car and their silence until a thought crosses Will’s mind.

“How did you know I was with Jack?”

His wife bites her lip, she doesn’t take her eyes out of the car in front of them. “Beverly told me.”

“Of course she did…” Will lets out in a sight.

“What do you want her to do, huh? She is worried about you too; she’s your friend, and she knows better than I do what working under Jack’s dictatorship does to you.” She shakes her head with disapproval before adding: “If you’re not going to be responsible of yourself at least someone needs to be there to look after you.”

Will chuckles. He is getting heated. “What am I? A fucking child? I don’t need yall to take care of me or infantilize me every single time my mind goes wrong. It has done this my entire life and I have been a functional adult since before meeting you.”

“Then why don’t you act like a fucking adult?” Alana answers coldly. “At least a normal adult would get away from all the bullshit that hurts them.”

“Wow.” His own amazement almost makes him laugh sardonically out of pure despite.

The man finally looks at her direction, she doesn’t return the gesture. Her grip is too tight to the wheel that her knuckles are going completely pale, and one of her cheeks is being sucked in to bite onto the previously hurt flesh.

They have that in common, biting the inner flesh of their cheeks when they are under pressure; Will is sure she started to copy it unconsciously and it finally transformed into a habit. Neither of them had tried to fix it before, and seeing the way their conversation is going, is possible they won’t fix it in the near future neither.

“I didn’t know adults weren’t allowed to make mistakes. Do you usually tell your clients to behave themselves because they are acting like children? Do you give them a lollipop after

the session if they didn't make any mistakes for the last weeks?" Eventually the sarcasm needed to go out. His own knuckles get white when he squeezes his armrest.

"No, because my clients are usually having problems with their orgasms in bed instead of going to crime scenes and almost orgasm while they imagine killing someone."

"I didn't orgasm." He answers, nauseated with her response.

"I said almost."

They keep it quiet. The traffic advances slowly, letting ten cars pass before it stops completely again. The weather doesn't seem to get better any sooner.

Will sighs profoundly, letting all air coming into his lungs and then going out till he is hungry for more.

He didn't orgasm, nor he was close to. He has to admit that this time things felt different, *he* was different. For once the ocean was clear and warm, the algae and corals were living things instead of dying people and, *for once*, there was a stream rocking him softly. It just lasted until the car started.

Remorse was installed in his heart when Alana started to complaint about his life decisions, with it came repulsion and repugnance for his own body and existence, been these followed by anger and deception nourished by his wife's crude words. Just then he had the assurance that he was back to himself, his reflection even looks like the one he always sees on mornings after bad dreams and sleep paralysis provoked by his large life of trauma.

While his mouth said that he was a functional adult despite his endless agony, he is aware that his actions are not the most trustful evidence to support his statement.

Notwithstanding, in the moment the river engorged his body, and the pendulum burned his mind, none of that mattered. A life with no remorse, rejection, or guilt for his actions felt tender and warm like a good love story told before bed after eating cookies and warm milk with honey. The comfort from taking Tsubame's heart into his hands gave him was liberating of all the burden he once carried in the same way Sisyphus was condemned to pull the rock to the top only for it to roll all the way down again.

The gift not only showed him his creation coming alive, but it also took out the rock from the way. If he is to describe the sensation, it can be compared to an explosion tossing colors and sparkles until extinction.

Will looks at the smiley face on his window, staring at him with genuine ambition and relief. It is satisfied.

But the painter isn't.

The woman sitting by his side seems lost in her thoughts, in her life. Trust dead and buried inside the grave she never thought she would have to use.

'If I were my patient, my advice to this would be: don't do this.'

Because she was afraid of that instability.

What changed that? Is a question he has asked himself repeatedly, at the end Alana did it. She took his hand and put a ring on his finger, she promised love and understanding in front of their friends, colleagues, and family *(her family; not that he has much. After the dead of his mother only his dad was the one able to assist to the wedding. Will won't forget two things from that day: how beautiful his wife looked in white; and how surprised his father was to know that there was someone out in the world who could love him. Sins and all)*.

Whatever is the answer–and he knows it–he will ignore it, because then he will be a human being, and Alana will be relaxed to know that he is a human being.

When their car passes next to the accident, Will stares directly at the upside-down red car that caused the traffic. The water makes it look like drops of watercolor mixing on the godet, contaminating every pigment to make something useless to work with. There's an ambulance with its lights off and none of the authorities involved seem to be in a hurry.

The list of corpses arriving at the mortgages increases a bit more tonight, and the chapels and mortuaries are adding more services to their agendas.

Police won't reveal the «real identity» of Tsubame for now, there is no evidence to support it. She died like a martyr and will be buried like a saint; Will wonders what the funeral will be like, how many will be there, most importantly, if *he* will be there. He hopes *he* will, he hopes he–himself–could be there too.

Alana speeds.

"Georgia thinks that another book will be ideal." He tries to break the silence. "To give it closure."

"What will you do when that ends?" Her voice comes out in a mumble.

"I was thinking of writing fantasy. Or, to keep going with mystery but taking off the murders."

"Yeah. That'll be great." She is still absent from reality. Will looks at her again.

"Alana. I'm sorry."

She comes back to him with a sad grin, is quick the contact of their eyes before looking to the road. "I'm sorry too. I shouldn't have said that."

"You were angry–"

"That doesn't excuse what I said. I was angry and you were… beautiful." Will frowns but doesn't respond. He waits for her. "I really don't know what you saw, or what you meant by *«God»*, but… if only you could see the face you had. Will, you were shinning, you were so happy I got scared because I never saw you like that before. I got scared because you were enjoying it so much, I almost felt envious of your happiness until I remembered you were watching a girl taking her last breath. I am worried, I don't want you to go back to something

that I thought we had got over with. What if I lose you? What if you lose *yourself*? I can't even– It was too much for me, and–"

Will sees tears falling down her cheeks, they shine with every low light from the vehicles going in contrary. She looks like a ghost made to take him home, near to dismay. There, in the dark, in the middle of a storm, Alana looks unreal. One of those «third person» phenomena people swear to see when they are in danger, products of their agonizing minds trying to find comfort and solutions before death can even touch their hands.

In some real and crude way, Alana *is* his third person, and that just discomforts him more.

His hand opens in the center console, inviting her to hold him so he can know she is real and so she can see he is not the monster he had to pretend to be. Alana doubts it before intertwining her fingers with his, her hold is hot and firm–yet it feels empty to him.

She is afraid to let him go.

They remain silent for the rest of the trip. He counts how many times the wiper washes turn from right to left before Alana turns them off when they arrive home. In Wolftrap the rain is nothing but a simple breeze covering the surface of everything it touches. It is he who takes the umbrella from the back seat, and it is him who goes out of the car to open it, his wife follows his moves as he walks around the car to her door and opens it for her. They stare at each other with no perceptible feelings in between, however, he can feel her inner self fighting to not take his hand again. Finally, she goes out.

The lights in the house are on, the dogs are sitting by the door while they wait for their owners to come in and the almost sparse smell from the stew she was cooking before the call welcomes them inside. It is warm and cozy, perfect to avoid getting sick from walking in the cold–although it was just barely a splash, Will is not so trustful of his defenses right now. He goes directly to the kitchen after taking off his shoes and his jacket, Alana goes upstairs after doing the same as him.

On his way to the stove he sees the shell and the medium cushion inside it; it's now covered in fur and a little piece of the edge has disappeared; it doesn't seemed to have been eaten by the dogs so he suspects it might have come off when Alana was changing the cushion. He doesn't dare to ask her to confirm it because of the fear of her throwing it into the trash. He turns the stove on.

"We should have thrown salt in our backs before coming in, so the bad spirits can stay outside, you know?" Alana enters the kitchen with a new change of clothes. She walks to stand next to him and feel the warmth of the stove.

"Then I would have to sleep of the car." He jokes. His wife hits her hips with his and that makes him chuckle.

"Yeah, maybe we should have done that, so I wouldn't have to deal with your sleep talk. I was freak out the first time I heard you do it and after you went out of the FBI I slept like a baby for *years, Will. YEARS*."

Alana sits on a chair on the table, her eyes focused on the little dog that stretches to put its paws on her knees. Buster barks for her to pet him. Will smiles at the sight of how one of his bravest dogs melts under her touch; they might be a family made to chase and hunt, Will with killers and his dogs with other little animals, but they all have the same weakness.

'I think they'll love you more than they loved me.' He told her once. She didn't want to believe it; however the dogs showed it at every opportunity. It gave him the relief he needed to know that no matter what happened, she would be safe.

Will leans on the kitchen counter. Eyes forever lost in a painting on the wall that shows the vista of a bay with purple skies and small waves dragging their white foam to the shore, there are a few boats in the picture too. It is so serene he aches for it.

They haven't gone out it a while, not with Alana having classes at Georgetown, the conferences, the researches and interviews, and with Will's books and interviews. The negotiations for movies and series are also there and is a requirement for him to assist even if he doesn't want to. Georgia is always pushing him out of his comfort zone in the wrong directions, throwing him out of precipices without a parachute.

Now with the FBI pointing a finger at him–whether accusatory or worried–he needs to escape for real before a madman can even come and kill his family in his sleep just because of jealousy.

"Let's go somewhere." He says after a while.

She looks at him in surprise. "Like vacations? Will Graham, the workaholic, is actually suggesting vacations?" Her smile is so beautiful his decision is finally made. Everything to please her. "But wouldn't it be a problem with you being a suspect again?"

Will shakes his head and walks to the formal table, kneeling in between her thighs. "Let them think whatever they want to think, as long as you know I'm innocent is enough for me. All I want right now is to dine with you and take a pill before going to sleep. Tomorrow we can plan everything else. The FBI doesn't have to be a problem again."

Her touch on his cheek is warm, soft, *empty*. He tries to hush away the feeling of emptiness that it brings him.

"I'll check my calendar. Then we'll decide where to go."

That was the plan a year ago.

June is back and the weather is perfect to spent a day in the river. The stream is gentle, cold, holy, and a bit turbulent; the dirt being dragged by the water doesn't stop it from looking like gold thanks to the decaying sun, and when the movement of its flow sends flashes of lights hit into his eyes. For the past months, it has grown in size thanks to the ice melting on the lake from where it is born and the recent rains.

A week after Tsubame, he woke up sweating, heart pounding on his ears and adrenaline running through his body in an electric shock that dizzied him until he was fully aware of his surroundings; he was lucky Alana left for the month for a conference on the other side of the country, so he could scream and talk in his sleep all he wanted without being worried of her hearing him.

He has never found use on recording himself to know what he says, the dreams always stay fresh during the day perfectly detailed for him to even recite them out loud. Sounds, sensations and words happened in his unconscious are left engraved in his psyche to hunt him at any time, they get worse when he is distracted or too mad. It was a normal performance that lasted for months depending on how much time he invested in the cases, and waking up feeling remorseful or disappointed with his own persona were usually accompanied with the nightmares, so, he hoped the same for Tsubame and her killer.

Just to later find out that dreaming of him wasn't like having Hell behind the door of his closet.

So yes, he was the reason why Will felt so lucky when Alana left. It had been enough when she found him in the bathtub five years ago and knowing that someone is now looking for her husband is to add more worries to her busy life. The FBI isn't sure he knows Will is the writer, and according to what Beverly told him, there is an internal investigation amongst the people who used to be his team when he worked at the BAU. So far, there hasn't been any order to guard his house or to put them in a safety house. Unless he tries something «funny».

With every passing night Will saw his brain rot thanks to a fruit full of mold implanted in it, in just a few days the mold covered the grounds and now it is escalating the logs of the threes.

What should have stayed like all the others–simple bad dreams full of mumbles that often combined with other cases or problems in his daily life–became part of his sleeping routine. Tsubame died in his hands once and again every night he did get to sleep, sometimes changing the execution, the words that he used to relax her and the organ he extracted. When he didn't dream of killing her, Will dreamt of what happened afterwards: closing her chest, washing her, dressing her, doing her hair and makeup, putting her in the store—that most of the time was represented as his living room—and decorating with flowers around her.

The rush of adrenaline was what made him shiver with so much excitement and pride that he ended up waking up soaking wet. Will didn't grow used to the feeling, though. It was too much for him, yet he ached to consume more from it. The hole it dug in his brain is too big and attractive it's becoming hard for him not to get swallowed by it; inside there is the clean ocean he met the first time he saw her, full of life and magic. A natural element that never harmed him nor drowned him. Made by him, for him.

Such happiness became an addiction after a few months it forced him to sit down to enjoy the tides of ecstasy that hit his body after waking up. They were little episodes that were soon covered by a terrible melancholy, ending with him feeling the need to kneel and ask for forgiveness every single moment the bloody heart of Tsubame stopped moving on his hand.

Like any other addiction, he had times when he was clean (meaning that he was awake most nights), and times when he relapsed into his little habit even when he was awake.

And as a result of the dose losing effect, two paths were born from the need to choose what to do next when his daydreaming was interrupted by the «supposed morale» he has: feeling rage or ignoring his morals and feeling loved.

Work is better than ever with him being his–almost–own boss; he is married to the love of his life (sometimes described as an angel, perfection itself); he has his dogs; a house of his own; and sometimes he fixes boat motors to have extra money (and so people won't think he lives from Alana's money). It is almost a perfect life. Or at least he is trying to convince himself that it is a perfect life.

Sure, his job isn't what he genuinely likes; his wife is afraid of him, and the marriage is hard to describe as «full of love» *but at least is not over; and every person he knows thinks of him as a poor creature abandoned in the street to wander on its own. They'll cry, they'll pet him, and they'll look at him with sorrow.*

But no one is taking him home.

So—and this is the jealousy talking—how dared him to brag about all the happiness in his life so freely? He is wrong, and he is sick, but apparently, he lives happier than Will has ever been. Being a monster doesn't stop him from having a life, having good money (he was Tsubame investor!), being the center of attention. His lack of empathy grants him the capacity to enjoy himself all he wants without any fear or regret of the consequences.

On the other hand, Will, with all his empathy, has nothing but problems connecting with others and loving like he wants. Salvation for others, condemned for him. He is being used his entire life, people always fear he will bite, and no one has the decency of thanking him for sacrificing himself for others. Yes, helping people made him so happy, and it was beautiful… but he gave his all for nothing at all, all *to ended up vetoed from the FBI and ended up forgotten by the people he saved.*

(You could put a movie to one of the victims and their family about the process of how they got justice and do a complete section with multiple camera shots with Graham from every angle and yet none of them would have remembered he was there. And it was okay to some point, right? Because at least the FBI congratulated him, and his students admired him despite his terrible personality. Well, wrong! Even walking to the crime scene a year ago felt like stab directly to his stomach with all his ex-colleagues watching him with astonishment and incredulity. They had the right to do it, but they didn't had the right to judge him… is not like he is the only one with blood on his hands, is just that he is the only one who looks dangerous with red stains covering his skin).

"S wrong to kill.' Taught him a man who removed his violent tendencies with more violence. 'You'll go to Hell. You'll burn there.' Will wishes his father were also his father, at least there would have been someone to teach him how to be a «righteous human being».

The other option, when he is feeling too down to almost fall into crisis, is to embrace all that elegant violence. Don't look back, don't feel remorse, just float.

Will has seen altars made in the name of love. He has met murderers who killed in the name of love, and he has seen protection and worship given to the victims even after their dead.

Achilles chased his enemies out of spite, and he almost killed himself when he knew about his lover's dead, when he died he had his rests buried with Patroclus's ashes.

Apollo killed someone so he could have Hyacinth. Later, Zephyrus killed Hyacinth because if he weren't his, he wouldn't be for others (that might not be the real reason, but he is too high to reason).

He is well informed about sacrifices, blood rituals, self-flagellation done to be noticed for others, and hearts stopping to please Gods and myths. It's a kind of love so irrational and consuming and dark and pathological and appealing that always made him wonder how it felt, and now that he finally has it, he doesn't know what to do with it. It is powerful, and it intoxicates him so fine that he can't do anything but let himself being tranquilized by its stream. He imagines that man loving him, worshiping him, kneeling before a throne towered for him to sit on top. (The only idea made him vomit twice one day when the remnant of the memory stayed too long).

He can't reject that love, he doesn't know what will happen if he rejects that love, he doesn't even understand if he wants to reject that love that seems and feels so genuine and oddly innocent. For months–of not eating, barely sleeping, studying the case and similar more–he was stuck to the news in secret, searching for new information or for a new one that could calm down his anxiety.

Oh, how exasperating it was to find that there weren't new tableaus for him!

Time goes on waiting and feeling bad for waiting until the remaining crumbs of the visions are swept under the carpet and he forces himself to move on even if it means feeling more alone than ever.

The phone rings a couple of times, his editor, his publisher, his responsibilities; he ignores them all because is the best thing to do and after a while they ignore him too, obliging to his little tantrums.

When Alana finally convinced him to leave the house at the end of November and go to a bar with some of her usual friends. He doesn't know much about them, and they don't know much about him; they talk about mundane things, baseball, work, politics… all with the same answer and the same visions, though slightly different from the ones he has.

And in the back of the pub there is Alana, taking a quick chat with colleagues. The ones who will go farther in life helping people and winning medals, the Price Nobels and the ones who aren't attracted enough to death to keep their minds covered in blood and stinky liquids. None of them knows how it feels to be loved by a murderer, not like they do.

In that little bar, is just Alana and Will sharing the feeling, and that makes it special for him to know that there is something keeping them together for now.

Will asks for another round of beers to distract the need to imagine an earthquake happening to save him. Maybe a chunk of concrete could fall and smash the man in green shirt, the blood will splash and spread, staining all their clothes and the floor–it'll take the staff months to take the stain out of the wood–, the shock will be so big he would have a reason to

leave and not be in a place where he is forced to socialize by pretending he remembers their faces when he leaves. He forces the thought away with a few shots someone asked for.

One night he falls asleep, but he doesn't dream of him. Is the first time in months that he slept so deeply without interruptions, finally recovering from all the sleep deprivation he had. He wanted to tell his wife about it, then go back to their normal, pacific life and Alana could celebrated like she did when he stopped talking in his sleep after the cases were closed.

But not seeing him was absurd, nevertheless, and his mourning started right after that.

December and January passed slowly. It was hard to hunt, and it was hard to fish now that all animals were hibernating, giving him less options to kill time and the feeling of loss coming with them.

It was even harder to spend the holidays alone with his wife, winter is the only season that allows them to be together, and in other time he would be happy about it, now both of them become distant and none of them is ready to ask «why?». They play with the dogs in the snow, and they do some indoors activities to pretend they can suppress the vibe before she can leave to spend a day or two at her friend's house. He doesn't stop her, he never tried to. After all he is the one with the ring.

Beverly invited him to her department in April, five months into his well-hidden *depression.*

Will went in, the bags under his eyes were dark and big, he looked sick, but she didn't say anything. The neurological connections on his brain hadn't been working in weeks (his whole life to be honest, but we can't interfere in that), he is too scared to see a doctor and to even think about medication, so he chose to stay still as he felt how the flies walked on his brain and down his spine feasting on the remains of his happiness, sex drive, energy or «will to live».

She called him from the kitchen, and he walked to her slowly in the same way one goes out of a store after stealing something for the first time. She'll know, he remembers thinking, he will sit right by her side, and she'll know someone just broke his heart, and he wouldn't know how to explain that it was Tsubame and that «friend» *of hers*.

Beverly looked good–unlike him–, the tan on her skin had almost disappear due to the cold climate and he couldn't help but think that he might had the appearance of a ghost for the same reason. Beverly kisses his cheek; it feels tender compared to the one Alana gave him before she left. He is used to his wife's emptiness and is funny to think that a man who constantly rejects affection, he is starved of touch. Yet, it tastes like nothing when he finally has it in his mouth.

"You look like shit." She said. Beverly didn't look at him, her sight was stuck to her pan and the meat frying on it.

"Bad weeks." He lied. They were terrible weeks, nauseous months, pitiful times.

Will sits on a chair from the counter with his sight glued at the fire on the stove.

It danced and jumped from one side to another, the sound of the oil crisping every time she added vegetables or sealed the meat on the hot surface gave music to its choreography. His imagination gave him a powerful picture where there was only Beverly on fire, standing next to the stove, the flames had reached her body and consumed her entirely as the food on the pan blackened. She didn't scream or move just to please him… Just like Tsubame stayed still for her own friend.

The fire was so big it illuminated the entire room, and her body couldn't be seen anymore. A movement in the corner of his eye made him turn. Tsubame was sitting on a bean chair, eternally youthful and elegant with her pale skin covered by the green dress and her long hair shining thanks to the show in the kitchen. The flames covering his friend reflected on Tsubame's skin and doll-dead eyes, and she sat in the chair so proudly it stopped being a bean chair and transformed into a throne.

It was his first time seen her as part of another dream that had nothing to do with her; Tsubame looked like the river behind his house on summer. He was happy to see an old friend.

"Where is Alana?" Beverly asked.

Will open his eyes to look at her back. "Her friend just had a baby, and she is a single mother, so Alana is taking care of her. She will be back in a week." That's the thing about them. When he is home she is not, when she is home he is not. He guesses that is another reason they haven't divorced.

He thought marrying her would take him out of the dark hole, she thought so too. It just put him into a deep one they both decided to cover.

"You should try doing drugs." She said.

'I've been doing them. Just not the regular ones. Mines appear on my bathtub with a green envelope.'

"So you can have a reason to arrest me and inspect me?" He asked back.

"You look haunted. I haven't seen that look on you for a while." She said.

"It'll pass." He said.

"It'll get worse, and you will do nothing about it." She said.

"I'm used to this; I know how it'll end." He said. Laying. He didn't know how it would end because it was the first time something had hurt him so much.

"Well, you shouldn't be. Being used to something bad for us doesn't reduce the pain. It just disconnects your brain from reality, and I don't want to see you like that." She said.

"You can always leave me." He said.

"Don't be selfish." She said.

“Why do I feel so different from others?” He asked.

“You have always been a little different. It is a great tactic, you know? That way no one knows if something is wrong with you.” She said.

“But you do.” He said.

“I think I do.” She admitted.

"You do." He reassured her.

That night he dreamt about something unusual.

«A baby cries in the street. Rain and lightning make a symphony that accompanies the whimpering shouts of the little thing. More than wanting to calm it, the rain seems to be caused by its cries. The baby is hidden in an alley Will has seen before, he walks a lot by there since the wine store is close, normally it had illumination but now it is covered in a penetrating obscurity.

As if the baby can feel him getting closer, it cries louder and louder. Is not like it needs to, Will wouldn't leave it on the rain, he can't ignore the precious thing. The little creature is in the floor, it is the only thing he can see in full color, lines and shapes highly defined in comparison to the things that are supposedly surrounding them. A basket and a rag kept it almost dry, and Will takes it on his arms to shake it softly from side to side to stop its crying.

Now they are both wet under the squall. Will walks to the light, outside from the black hole, with the child on his arms. They go home, he bathes it, he dresses it, keeps it warm, and feeds it. But no matter how hard he tries to save it, the unfortunate thing is dying, and the little sobs won't stop. Will accepts its fate and lulls it to sleep so it can die peacefully.

A part of him has always known that the reason babies cry so much after sleeping is because they are afraid of dying. Death is not so different from resting. His responsibility now is to become Charon and guide the child towards the other side, with his arms forming a canoe for the kid, Will accompanies it and coos it, so it isn't afraid of the afterlife.

Something in him tickles after a while. A part of his brain reasons that it misses its mother's nip, it needs to suck at least for comfort.

Will gives it his finger, the tip covered in honey so the baby can enjoy sweetness before its dead. The baby, in exchange, bites the finger hardly enough to pull a bite of flesh. Will didn't notice it had teeth, sharp knives that cut and saw through his meat and bone.

The little thing sucks the blood that drips out of his lacerated finger with hunger and greed. Its cheeks get colored by a soft blush that chants content about life itself. Glimpses of light come into its irises when the next piece of flesh goes down its throat and Will can't help but feel happiness.

His baby will live. His baby needs him to live.

Will sits on his favorite couch on the living room, the one so near to the chimney that it now smells like smoke even when the fire is extinguished. They share that intimate moment in the light of the tender flames that embrace them both. When it is satisfied, Will cleans its face covered in the warm, red liquid with the hand he used to feed it. There is no longer a finger and the chewed edge around the first joint keeps dripping blood over the creature's face.

It is then when Will takes the thing in his arms and guides it to his mouth to lick it clean like a dog would do with its puppies. It tastes metallic, salty and a bit acidic, mixed with the sweetness of the baby's smell it is all a luxe that brings him too much satisfaction.

The baby giggles and Will smiles back. They find comfort in each other's consumption. To be loved entirely, he discovers, feels amazing, and tastes divine.»

Now that he remembers the dream, he wonders if Alana has ever loved who he is behind the mask. But he knows she doesn't, that's why she murmured into Prunell's ears to get him out of work.

Because he is a menace

And she is the most beautiful flower he has ever laid eyes on. A lily of the valley that is never afraid of winter. In fact, cold weathers suit her better. She is a venomous flower that radiates joy to those around her. She has this kind of immortal beauty that hunts his dreams sometimes, with her black hair consuming the light of the sun, her blue eyes that paint the sky and her pink lips that remind him of pomegranates he can bite whenever he wants. In her soul lives the lighting peace that struck those who fought to the end of times, and the timeless harmony that oozes from her is a weird jewel capable to make the richest men look poor.

Alana Bloom is one of the few people with the capacity to put him on his knees, to tame him with sweet nothings and tender love. And Will loves her, he loves her so much his heart is hurt at the idea of not being able to fuse with her, to swim in her veins. *(Or at least he thinks he loves her, even though hasn't feel happy around her in the last years of their marriage)*.

His wife's birthday came in May and her family was there, and her friends were there, and all the people he has been ignoring (because of the remorse, because of the embarrassment, because he thinks that they'll know he's been dreaming with Tsubame) are there. The guilt built in him is so big at this moment he wants to confess, he wants to excuse himself, ask for forgiveness and do anything for them to see that he is not a bad guy, but he has fallen in love with the memories of a murderer who loves existing with an enthusiastic force.

'But <u>he</u> is alone' he has to remember himself. Will has people but he is alone too, aren't they so good for each other then?

Some people told him about God and mantras and cults and religion and rituals and therapy; he had tried them before; they don't work for him. He blames himself by saying that maybe he doesn't believe enough to be seen amongst God's favorites, and excuses himself by saying that he knows all the trick for therapy. No one can enter his mind… at least no one sane or alive.

Finally we are back on June. There have been some squalls, and the temperature is starting to rise. Will stopped looking at the news in March and after the dream of the baby he got back to feel like an empty carcass.

Spring and Summer are his favorite times of the year, the days are perfect for fishing and maybe camping outside by his own–surely, not forgetting the dogs. People are outside enjoying the weather and animals are reproducing again–maybe one of his dogs can have puppies this year–the ground is getting wet making sludge to play with, and flowers are growing fast, covering the bald spots winter left behind.

Will's been on the water all day, he is probably getting sick as soon as he goes out, but it won't matter a lot. The bucket he got for his fishes has just four medium silver things that are still alive and pretty much confused about their captivity. He is leaving a note for Beverly to look in his fridge and take them home as a demonstration of his gratitude when she took him home after he got wasted in a bar.

When he finally came back to his mind he was in the back seat of a car that isn't his or Alana's, and the woman driving has the hair too short to be his wife's. Will smiles when he recognizes her voice, and the grin stays there as she sings:

"She needs you like she needs her tranqs,

To tell her that the world is clean,

To promise her a definition,

Tell her where the rain will fall,

Tell her where the sun shines bright,

And tell her she can have it all."

He sang with her, and she smiled with relief to know he was alive; Beverly didn't stop singing one song after the other until they were at home again and she helped him out of the car. He was proud of himself because he hadn't pissed his pants.

Before going into his house he took a moment to admire the structure and the pines that surround it. The dogs were outside, all happy to see him safe. Walking the stairs to his front door was harder than he thought, and the images of his mess made him put a hand on the door so she couldn't open it, however she was already pushing him inside.

If she was grossed out by the interior, she didn't say anything. Beverly left him on the coach after putting down a few bottles that occupied the space, all he did from then on was to lose and regain conscience as he saw her cleaning up his mess. She congratulated him for taking good care of the dogs, Will felt proud of being a good father.

When Beverly was finally done Will was sleeping peacefully on the coach, she didn't want to leave him alone, but she trusted him; she always does, she will be back, she told him even

when he couldn't hear her, don't die, she begged him. Alana is away again; she won't be home until Saturday.

Will woke up a few hours later, the pain on his head came and went menacing with the hangover that would come and would be one of the most painful he had ever had.

Another bottle popped up; the logic was that if he didn't stop being drunk the hangover would never come. He just drank enough, wouldn't like to end his last bottle so easily, and he stayed on the coach having epiphanies of his future.

Pythia finally showed him his destiny and that takes us to today and to his last moments on Earth. Will has accepted that he is not back and won't be… but why should he be? By killing himself he can do two things he has been longing for: one, dying; two, show that he is still good as his work by stopping a murderer.

In his letter he left the instructions, specifically planned to at least end the massacres; he left instructions for Alana and his dogs; Beverly, Jimmy and Brian–although he hasn't seen this two in a really long time; and he even left something for Georgia. For Crawford are the instructions, to let the people know about his identity and wait for someone unfamiliar to attend the private funeral–unfamiliar to Will, not to the people he is close with. Someone who is there to give comfort but who never spoke to him directly. He doesn't has a lot of faith in his plan but is the least he can do. The other option is plan B: let the news give him a message.

The rest will be story, and if he doesn't succeed he won't care because he will be dead.

Will walks out of the water when the sky starts to paint black, his dogs–lost in the forest–go back to him when he whistles, and they all walk home with their own preys on hand. Will with his fishes, the dogs fighting over a branch.

"It is better like this." He says to them.

If he doesn't exist then he won't exist. The probability of him killing himself jumps into his mind and he considers that it might be good in that way. If he doesn't exist then he won't attempt hurting Alana or his dogs, or Beverly. If he doesn't exist Crawford won't bother him anymore so he can keep saving his ass. If he doesn't exist...

Alana might cry for him. But she will finally have a reason to live the life she wants with the person she loves.

"It is better like this." He repeats to the air.

The pack walks home, meanwhile Will fights to write his last message to Alana, something about her buying dog treats to make more time. He reads it again and again and again until he is pleased with it and sends it; and he is happy, and he is calm. He feeds his dogs, kisses them, changes his clothes and sits in his office with the door closed and a gun with just one bullet on his desk.

It looks at him with a smile on its barrel, it is a seductive thing it does with the curves of the trigger and the shape of the nuzzle, and these become the final moments of life for the man who can't handle living in the flesh of a killer who has been filling his mind with wonders and questions (*'is he coming back? Why hasn't he killed? Doesn't he know that I received his message? He doesn't love me anymore? What is wrong with me? I'm supposed to stop murders, not to wait for them. He won't do it again if there is no one he can show it to. I'll ask Tsubame on the other side. Why show me his love if he is going to disappear?*).

He never got better.

Will thought that time would cure him from whatever he infected him with, and yet, it only led him to wish to have *something* that could give him back that feeling of nirvana.

'Orgasms are also known as «little deaths» because of the response the body has to it. The ears stop working and vision turns off, meanwhile, a rush of adrenaline runs through the body and the neurochemicals in charge of relaxation are liberate to the body to help it receive the afterlife more easily.' Alana was right. *He didn't orgasm*, but damn right it felt like it.

Now he is just waiting for the big death to come and hold him.

This is the moment of truth; his hand holds the gun, and his mouth opens immediately letting the pain of closing his mouth to hard cover his facial bones and teeth. Every movement feels right, and just as the gun comes closer to his palate, he can't help but compare the sensation to what the Tsubame doses made him feel. The Man, The Legend, The Killer Stalker, Will Graham is tasting the metal on his tongue and the drums beat faster and louder, the people on the terraces stand up and cheer loudly for him waiting for the King with blurry face to put his thumb down so the bullet can go across his head.

The drum rolls hold the people on their sits, their hearts pounding madly in their chest when he unlocks the gun, and the smell of gunpowder decorates the scene. *Ladies and gentlemen and public in general, this is IT, THE MOMENT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, WILL GRAHAM HAS HIS FINGER ON THE TRIGGER AND THE STADIUM GOES SILENT AS THEY WATCH. HE DOESN'T CRY, THERE IS NO TIME FOR THAT.*

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT, BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT, TAKE SOME FUCKING COURAGE AND DO IT. THE VIEWERS ARE WAITING AT HOME, WILL! DON'T LET THEM DOWN LIKE YOU HAVE DONE SO MANY TIMES BEFORE!

PARENTS AT HOME! BRING YOUR KIDS CLOSER TO THE TV SO THEY CAN WATCH THE FINAL MOMENT OF WILL GRAHAM, THE VIDENT, THE ULTIMATE TROPHY ON PSYCHYATRISTS,' PSYCHOLOGISTS' AND NEUROCIENTISTS' SHELVES. THE AIR IS FILLED WITH TENSION AND THE PEOPLE HOLD THEIR BREATH AS IF THE GUN IS GOING TO KILL THEM ALL THE MOMENT IT BLOWS HIS SKULL AND SPLATERS HIS BRAIN AND BLOOD IN THE WALL AND INTO THE FLOOR.

OH? WHAT IS THAT? HE IS WATCHING THAT MEMORY ONE LAST TIME! HE KILLS TSUBAME AGAIN, HE CHANGES HER AGAIN, BUT HE DOESN'T FEEL HAPPY LIKE

BEFORE, HE NEEDS MORE AND MORE AND MORE AND MORE AND OH YES! GUILT COMES HERE!

HE PRAYS.

HE WAITS.

HE BREATHES.

THE DRUM ROLLS ARE LOUDER AND LOUDER AND CLOSER AND CLOSER TO HIS EARS UNTIL THEY DEAFEN HIS OWN HEART. RIGHT NOW, HE IS ADDING PRESSURE TO THE TRIGGER. THE COWNTDOWN BEGINS:

TEN

NINE

EIGHT

SEVEN

SIX

FIVE

FOUR

THREE

TWO

ONE

THIS IS IT!

DO IT!

DO IT! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT! DO IT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT!

DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT!

DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT!

DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DOIT!

DOIT!DOIT! DOIT!DO–

BANG!

The King puts his finger upwards, he loves Will, he wouldn't let him die. The Queen puts her finger upwards too and the multitude sighs with deception.

Will opens his eyes when the sound takes him out of his mind and the gun leaves his mouth in a nimble. There are voices and barks downstairs. The gun is still in his hand when he hears steps coming closer to his door, with an almost failed intent to hide it because it falls from his hand twice until it finally finds its place on the drawer. Will hits his head against the desk when he stands up in the same moment someone opens the door.

Alana walks inside his office. Her messy hair and almost faded makeup show her tiresome, to that is add the big stain off coffee on her red dress. Her favorite, if he remembers well.

"Ugh! You won't believe what happened! Apparently someone found black mold in one of the bathrooms and now the Convention Center is being closed down. The Association is thinking on suit them for dangerous exposure, and they want me to participate, but I can't any more with my fucking life." She says with a beaming smile on her lips, although her eyes say the contrary.

"Hello to you too," He returns the smile, his is more of a smirk than a proper grin.

Alana chuckles, she sits in the table just in front of him and gives him a long kiss. "Hello, my dear. You won't believe what happened!"

"Try me."

"Did you missed me?"

"Like crazy. And you?"

She caresses his cheeks with her hands. It is barely a touch which makes him feel fragile.

"I missed you so much I rushed out of the building as soon as they said there was black mold. I just wanted to come home. It's been a week since I last saw you." She kisses him again. *How could he ever think there was someone else?* "By the way, Beverly is downstairs, she said she came here to cook you dinner because she was worried about you since you didn't

answered her calls.” Her eyes narrow and the grin on her mouth tells him that she doesn’t know the entire story nor the truth.

“Yeah, I was all day on the river, so I didn’t answer my phone. Besides, she was at work. I didn’t want to bother her.” Will smiles widely at her, and she relaxes. When Will touches her thigh, Alana blushes and stands up. He doesn’t show his deception. “Georgia says that she wants a draft of anything that can come to my mind, so I’ll write something before she thinks of breaking our contract.”

“Are you good to write?” She asks innocently.

‘No.’ He can’t answer, a knock on the door makes them turn. Beverly is holding a small box and a letter in her hand, and she looks relief when she sees him sitting on his chair. Safe and all.

“Sorry, if I’m interrupting but, someone left this on the door. It says that it is for you.”

“Who left it?” Alana asks whilst Will take both items in his hands.

The box is heavy and the only things around its surface are the signs of *«fragile»* and *«this way up»*.

“Delivery. She had a logo of a company in her blouse.” Beverly shudders. To Will she asks. “Didn’t you order something?”

“I think so, yes. But I wasn’t expecting to receive it until next week.”

“And the letter?” Alana takes it to inspect it. It is medium size, white, made with wove paper and sealed with a single wax signature that neither of them recognizes. It is light and soft. It looks elegant on her hand. “Do you want me to burn it on the chimney? Beverly can send it to Jack to analyze it if you want, right?”

Beverly nods.

“No, is okay. I’ll keep it. Knowing how Georgia is, this might be one of her tricks to make me write something.” He lies. “If it isn’t I’ll give it to Beverly, just don’t worry. Go down stairs and eat something, just take care Beverly won’t empty our fridge.”

His friend laughs and leaves after cursing him. Alana simply hits his shoulder softly.

“That poor girl is a slave under Jack’s administration, I swear I’ll kill him if he ever hurts her.” She kisses him on the lips, barely a brush. “If you need something, shout. I’ll see you downstairs.”

Will doesn’t say anything else since his attention is fully absorbed by the box. He closes the door when he makes sure his wife is downstairs before he opens the envelope. He doesn’t dare to break the seal, so he cuts the upside part with a razor hidden between some books of his collections.

There are two sheets of paper inside it, one filled from both sides and the other covering a little more than half the paper. The small, black letters were clearly made by a writing machine. The paper alone looks expensive, and the words wrote in it makes him forget why he was sitting there to begin with.

In it, it says:

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry for making his suicide attempt look like that, whilst it was his goal to turn his suicide into a media event it is also a way to show how his instability and his wanting to kill can overpower him. This kind of traits are common in certain types of murderers, so I'm somehow basing his erratic behavior on that too.
I want my Will to have a criminal profile that could feel realistic, and less written for T.V, but I don't want him to lose his essence just yet, I want it to be gradually, but real.

Anyway, let me know if you liked it, or if I should change something.

Deuteronomy 31:8

Chapter Summary

Just a letter

Chapter Notes

Should the death penalty be legal?
At first I said "yes", then it changed to "no" once I considered all the moral contrarieties the question brings. Technically it was a "revenge vs logical thinking" situation; logic won.

Anyway, I just learned that my Criminal Law teacher canceled today's class. Apparently he said it on Tuesday but I was at a Hozier concert. Priorities.

Enjoy :)

Dear Will,

I apologize for the inconvenient situation my work put You on. I know Your job is not something easy to do and the reputation that follows You is one created by the misunderstanding and the prejudices people often have about You. People tend to get scared of new things with explanations hard to comprehend.

But I must say that knowing You went back to Your natural space because of me, filled me with a pride I don't often feel.

The intention of this letter is to clarify a few things.

Miss Tsubame Aikawa and I were good friends. Our relationship was based more in a play of roles between teacher and student than proper family or a friendship of years. I taught her how to kill and how to be a human being, I saw her from a far as she made a life different from mine that I never denied her to build. Everyone loved her and admired her; she grew up to be a well-known citizen applauded for her help in the community. She fooled them all by making them think she did an excellent job to please others while in reality she worked for me as a hunt dog. I too have to recognize that her theatrical play was something beautiful worth of applauses and cheers coming from me.

Miss Aikawa–or as we should call her now to honor her properly–Miss Chiyo, was trained by me her whole life to become a lethal killer and a lovely saint. She was my right hand woman, my student and my protector although she was younger than me and killing her felt like and ecstasy I had never felt in my life.

I really would like to know how it was for You to experience my happiness and adoration in the moment her heart stopped working in my hand. How did You look when Chiyo died in your arms?

I don't want to talk much about her if my goal is for You to get interest in her as much as I was when I trained her, so I'll keep going with the topics I wanted to aboard on this letter.

I am curious to know if You would like to see young Chiyo's work before her dead, just for the mere curiosity to know if that changes Your vision about me or about her in some way. Sometimes she used to take a photo or draw a sketch when her job was done so I could see her art; every line and shadow made with the graphite was precise in its strength and motion. We take our jobs very seriously when it comes to art.

Chiyo was a girl of many abilities, one of the few people I have ever considered respectful enough to exist on this planet. So I'll answer another of Your questions.

Why was she the only one respectable enough to not be treated like the others? It wasn't only because of my attachment to her or her ability to kill. Chiyo was exceptional even in her intelligence. She was outstanding in everything she did: high notes at school, graduated with honorific mentions in college, she had a master, and she was getting ready for her doctorate. (That is why no one ever understood why she was a waiter on a mediocre restaurant; but here is the answer to that too).

Chiyo always felt too uncomfortable on her own skin, part of her way to look at the world came for her own projection of herself. Being an overachiever runs in the family, wanting to live the life of others is sometimes a dream we share, but her contrariety was a key step for her to realize her job. Chiyo took our need for perfection and transformed it into ritual focused on transcending the soul into their perfect state. The first time I heard about her work–when she finally found purpose–I felt inspired to work closely to her and to this side of the world You are not ready to be in.

She was ready to go when I told her my goal and the plans on building a gift for You. Her mission was completed and as much as it pained her not to be able to save me, she accepted that my place didn't correspond to the great Eden she conceived but to the world where You exist. Thankfully, she accepted the new mission her carcass had in this life.

She was beautiful, Will. There, lying on the table, held by soft ropes to avoid any involuntary movements, and completely naked for me to cut her open, she looked like real art. The white light made her skin shine and the process of cleaning her came with extra care only given to those who have just been born in this world. I felt glorious and proud when I finished my canvas. Every stroke and every pigment of the palette was the product of months of planning and exchanging suggestions with Chiyo. I think that if she had ever been able to look at her own body after her death, she would've also felt powerful in the way I did by standing in front his body to take the picture–just like she used to do with her victims.

I hope one of these days You can live up to that feeling too so You can recognize the beauty You hold in all that violence that resides in Your soul.

Killing for the first time makes us feel ashamed sometimes, so I will understand if the feeling of rejection of Your true nature makes an act of presence on You. It takes time to accept the shape of our souls before we can live in peace with it. First we must accept the contradiction imposed by rational society and our always changing desires; which should we follow in order to find our happiness?

Before Chiyo died, she told me something about You that I can picture perfectly as You. It is a passage from the Bible–Revelation 5:6–a book full of contradictions that resemblance a contradictory being and his contradictory actions. Yet, this series of discordant forces brings harmony to the world. Balance.

Our universe is formed by all these conflicts working in unison, our social experiences are constant debates and solutions pushing each other until there is nothing more to do. What would we be without aggression and resolution? This is what good Chiyo always believed in and predicated.

Good and evil have nothing to see with god. But Pleasure and Pain... I always kept that in mind when talking to my peers, of course, I always remind them of her malevolence more than her benevolence. They already know so much about her love. Sometimes, they dare to forget about her hate. Her rage. Her ugliness. Her contradictions.

We must accept the wrath of god if we want to embrace his love.

Isn't it a shame the FBI couldn't embrace Yours? Blind to their own egos and self-righteousness, they fired You from the place that suited You better. Well, at least You stayed under the lights for us to see and inspire us–You can't turn off the Sun, Will. Is the Sun who decides when it is its time to explode and kill those around him.

I would like to share every detail of my work with You. After all, You deserve to know the truth before anyone else since You are the creator of this tragedy that keeps us entertained.

You see, Will. Your Artist wanted recognition; I can agree with that. Who in this world does not want to be recognized and remembered by minds that can easily forget everything? But that wasn't my only intention, Will, what I wanted was to make them what they would never be.

PERFECT.

In their actions, of course. I know this sounds like a bad joke coming from a man who finds pleasure in killing, You and others may even think that we were all in the same category based on our behavioral patterns, but there are some things that are unspeakable rude and ugly to me. I base my life on aesthetic pleasantries, wise friends and poetic souls that can enrich my custom made suit. So, knowing that people as discourteous as them were capable to live, gave me the perfect idea for the bouquet I sent to You.

I would love to enter in detail, I really do. It excites me to teach You what I know and to learn what You know. To tell You how I caught them and how I chose every material to be put on their bodies, what made me chose the places I put them on and what was I thinking when I finally got to hold their guts in my hands. But that would be for another day, perhaps for a moment You are more willing to listen and less inclined to judge.

I hope to read Your answer soon. I left a piece of paper with coordinates inside the envelope. If You would like to stay connected with me, leave the letter there. If You want to go to the police and lend them this letter and the box, I will understand and forgive You before handed, even if that means the end of what could have been... this.

Please, grant me the pleasure of having Your company. I really want to see me in Your eyes, and I want You to see Your reflection on mine.

To finish, look about Tsubame all you want, and you might find her. But please, don't bother to look about Chiyo because all you'll find is a dead girl on the shore of a beach, and a heart on a jar. It is too soon for You to look farther.

Yours entirely,

Cain

Chapter Summary

> “I realize today that nothing in the world is more distasteful to a man than to take the path that leads to himself.”
> Demian. Hermann Hesse.

Chapter Notes

> Is it confusing, maybe, but the man has always been confused. He just doesn't want to accept it.
>
> Enjoy(? :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You are a haunted, ridiculous, sick man.

Do you have any idea how stupid and insane you are? Did you think I was going to jump right into your arms and tell you how much I loved your work? To «OH, PLEASE TAKE MY HEART AND LOVE ME»?

I don’t want to know anything about Tsubame, I don’t want to know about YOU. My life was perfectly fine before you came into it. What you did, what you showed and displayed was nothing but a nuisance, a rock in my shoe that I want out as soon as posssible. GO bother another writer, another FBI agent, but not me. I don’t want to be on that side of the world anymore.

Leave me alone. I don’t find you THAT interesting to keep going forward with this exchange you want, in fact, you are NOT mor interesting than the other killers have been, but I do find you terribly tiring and boring and inconvenient for the perfect life I’m trying to builld. I don’t want to know anything else about you, I don’t want to see your name in the news, I don’t want to see your next exhibitions and I don’t want your letters. Don’t glorify me and don’t try to convince yourself that we are at least on the same page because we are not. I’m not like you and I won’t go in a hurry to meet you because what you did grosses me out.

Whatever conception you have about me and about my ability are completely blinded by the admiration you feel for me (if we can call it admiration and not a fucking pathology). Nothing but rumors created by others who like to look at me like a fucking animal in the zoo,

so, if you have any respect for ME, you will stop trying to impress me with corpses and murders. Your head is so full of bullshit it amazes me you are still alive.

Do you think others haven't try the same thing? For me to look at them with compassion and understanding?

I don't want to be part of your riddles and your metaphors. I don't want to see your galleries of dead people and I DON'T WANT TO SEE HER CRIMES. Why would I wnt that? I'm not insane!

I dedicatd my life to save others, to stop people like you and to destroy every part of me to bring justice to the victims and families. And if I ever did something that hurt someone, it was to save others, it was because IT WAS THE RIGHT THNG TO DO! How can I enjoy seeing someone suffer? Tsubame, Chiyo or WHATHEVER THE HELL HER NAME WAS will be hate by tehe people who loved her and admired her as soon as I give your letter to the FBI, and I can't wait to know wha your family and friends would think of you when YOUR truth comes out too.

~~*I can't wait to know if the public will destroy you by tearing your limbs out of your body on the first chance they have to recover what you took out of others. They'll condemn you, slit your throat and let you drain in the name of those you hurt*~~ .

When the news stopped talking about you I felt relieved to think that maybe you were dead. That just how you found HER other killer caught you and displayed you with their own signature. ~~*Thinking of that made me happy because at last the person that is so convinced I'm as broken as he is, would stop bothering with his tableaus and his knowledge of fine arts.*~~ *But now you are back, not only that, but you are also in my house. How dare you?*

What good can two sinners give to the world? The only way to be good for each other, to exist in the same place is with divine intervention. If I got condemned to be reincarnated with you inside the same body. And even if that were possible, I would find the way to kill myself before living a life around a man how enjoys destruction so much. I'm not here to satisfy your solitary life, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY I'M HERE IN THIS LIFE, but one thing is for sure, and it is that I'm not here trying to run behind another killer.

Your head is so common, so typical as the others I've seen. You are not THAT special. You are just another killer made by the book.

All I have for you is hate, I can't wait for the right moment to bite you. You desrve to die; you are the only animal whose blood I wouldn't feel guilty to see running on the floor. I would kill you for the pleasure of feeling righteous.

What makes you think I would like to kill someone? Why are you so obsessed with me to go that far and start fantasizing abut me on your shoes? Get a life, wake up, look for help, I DON'T KNOW, just don't try to put me on your shoes again.

Seeing HER once was enough for me to see the type of person you are. Is more than enough for me to reject it and go about my way without you. She didn't look nice dead; HER OWN KILLINGS WOULDN'T LOOK NICE. I am not the right audience for your art projects.

Please, leave me alone. I don't want to become you again. You are not good to me. You are going to destroy me.

There is an FBI agent dining in his kitchen, and a psychiatrist is laughing with her. They are gossiping about their lives, their jobs, their pains and sorrows. They have Crawford's number on their phones, he can guess *he* is even their emergency contact. God! Even Will has Crawford's number on his phone because he is too lazy to erase it; one tap away and he could have the entire BAU on his house looking for evidence, tracing the letter down, looking at the box… and he is there… on his chair. With his heart racing and his fingers in pain for how hard he held the pen.

He stands up with both hands gripping his hair with such strength he can feel some locks ripping apart from his skin, blurry eyes stare at a paper full of grammatical mistakes and ink stains printing his fingerprints. Will looks around the room just to be sure he is alone and safe in his world of miseries and secrets that feel condemnatory; possibly, a feeling near to the experience of masturbating for the first time under a christian household. The whole situation is overwhelming till the point of having him feeling loathsome.

Will is not sure he has been blinking nor that he wants to in case it is all a dream and the letters disappear when the darkness behind his eyelids vanishes. In his ears is a buzz sound similar to insects flying around him. The man's words–if Will can call him a man–crawl all over his brain to find a place where to dig with their little legs, every comma and period is deposit in the holes to provoke myasis. The sole idea of <u>his</u> maggots feasting on his interior is enough to loosen up an unreasonable fear which leads him to scratch all places he can reach until there is blood coming out of a few wounds.

The hands that once hurt his skin are now covering his ears from the mysterious sound that doesn't let him go. A sound old like time and lost in the unconscious. The kid counts to ten, twenty, forty, sixty, hundred… his arms and legs get lighter, like smoke that could easily

make him float to other place far from the house he is living in, he grasps into this dream by letting himself go into the delusion of floating and escaping from his own body until the flies leave him alone.

It is the man who considers he is ready to look and the one who holds the edge of the table, trembling fingers almost incapable of recognizing the material it is made of. His vision is still cloudy thanks to the pressure he used to close his eyes.

His letter and the letter he sent him are placed side by side like two faces of the same coin. The drawer where the gun is opens instantly and he throws the papers there to close it right after in loud bang surely listened downstairs.

This is the first time he receives a letter from a killer; most of the time is Crawford the one receiving threats or surprises for getting his nose where he is not supposed to smell. The only letters he is aware of ever receiving are letters from obsessive readers, unwanted fans, uncalled lovers… Will takes his letter out again, his hand caressing from an instant the gun that was on his mouth moments ago, now completely forgotten in the darkness.

'I apologize for the inconvenient situation my work put You on.'

He thinks of it as a joke, he almost chuckles. An inconvenient situation… being put in an interrogation room, dreaming with a dead woman for months, having *fucking* panic attacks are apparently just *«inconvenient situations»!* Another rock on the shoe, a road closed because of a traffic accident, *food burned because someone forgot to turn the stove off.*

The letter on his desk is a stigma, the same one God gave to Cain after he killed his brother. Or maybe, the letter is just another of the punishments he has to bear since the day he was born.

'There's always something you can learn from the bad things; you just have to accept them first.' Said one of his father's sisters after the funeral to never see her again.

Will doesn't want to learn from bad situations, he didn't even want to be followed by them. Now he is standing at the top of a cliff, ready to jump and fall into the deep sea governed by a man whose face he doesn't know and by a siren whose bare chest only exist to welcome his knives. *Or* to do the right thing and call the entire FBI into his home and accept what it means to live in that world once more; Jack would want him working in the case, but even if his superiors tell him that it would be a bad idea to have a victim working directly with the enemy, he won't be entirely free.

There will be more questions, more doubts, more voices murmuring in his back that he might be the killer trying to inculpate others. If they move him and his family to a safe house, the rumor about him being the author would cost him his privacy and comfortable peace. The next thing would be the lure and their best shot would be to keep the correspondence open, having Will writing letter after letter so it can be credible. They might never catch him, but in the meantime, they fucked his mind a little more.

Seeing and knowing the meaning of *his gift* was an entire experience he didn't want to revive, he thought it was over. *He wished it were over* after Tsubame–*CHIYO*–stopped appearing in

his dreams and visions.

Entering in the mind of other murders is in itself bad for his–almost inexistent–mental health, now, *entering in the mind of a killer who loves him?* He can't allow himself to fall into that drug. To run from a creature that could find him wherever he goes by simply using its nose and Will's odor is completely useless; he doesn't need to know where he is since all that it takes for him to complete his goal is to know that Will *will look sooner or later.*

As the new understanding of his situation settles in his stomach like a heavy rock, Will finds the sensation rather disturbing when his words come to life again.

Contradiction. He was so damn right when he said contradiction was the biggest issue in Will's life; he was a man full of desires and wanton needs normally stopped by an almost religious moral compass that towered before him like the bench of a judge. This time is no different from the other times when he was discussing which choice was the best to follow.

On one hand he can listen to the side of him that likes the sensation of breaking skin under his fists and keep the heart–treasure it, ask for the pictures and return to that exquisite feeling of having everything under control as he lets the love of a mysterious man consume him from head to toes until he is nothing but a lightheaded mess. Tell him he missed him. *«Why did you leave me?»*

On the other hand, he is more than free–assured by him–to go downstairs and give the letter to Beverly, call Crawford and never know about him *(or be part of the investigation as it will be to follow protocol)*. He can begin to say goodbye to his–her–heart and restart his life as a new man who *will feel fine* for doing what is best.

Both ideas surround his throat with cold hands and push him down until the only thing he is aware of is the amount of strength that takes him to bite his inner cheek until a warm, metallic liquid touches his taste buds. Dreams of him biting into Chiyo's flesh to eat her come into reality, followed by the weight of a little creature covered in Will's blood as it rests in the man's arms, they are there to tempt him. To lure him.

Will looks down to the beauty of the wax seal pressed over the envelope, it has the head of a stag with big antlers crowning its head. Holding it feels prohibited, so delicate he is afraid for a moment it will disintegrate on his hands like cotton candy. A small card with some numbers makes act of presence as promised. They've been handwritten with a fountain pen in a type of calligraphy that highlights the beautiful, elegant and completely controlled quantity of ink that shapes their lines.

No name, no clues, just a game. He is claiming his position as a predator, he wants to play catch with Will because he believes that the man is like him in mind and soul. He has seen something in him that is perverse, he has seen the darkness and the horns on his head; Will wants no recognition of that side of his built to kill not to survive but to please an instinct, that side of his that now looks like a Japanese woman dressed in a green dress and whose hair looks like midnight sky in a world where stars don't shine anymore.

Chiyo is gorgeous, almond eyes shadowed in an almost imperceptible color to create a smoky gaze; elevated and soft cheekbones that elongate her face; soft, glossy lips always carrying a

subtle smile that shows her slyness; and on her hair, a light consuming darkness that makes her irises look like voids enthusiastic to gobble him up.

She's been naked in front of him a thousand times before to complete their intimate ritual, they had shared a frantic power that always culminates with him taking her offering in hand; and even though he has never listen her voice Will knows she is talking to him when she tells him about the beauty hidden under the mask he wears to keep others save. Chiyo caresses his cheeks, and he turns to avoid the soft touch that she gives him.

Notwithstanding, Chiyo is incapable of accepting rejection so easily. She takes his hand with a terrible energy hard to escape. Will watches as his hand is forced to find its place in the freshly opened wound in between her breasts; it leaks an obscure, thick liquid that smells like sulfur and iron, warm at the touch.

Its smell and stickiness guides him into a trance. He can't think of anything else aside from the wound that covers his fist, his acolyte's student shows him a rare gift coming from a creature who can understand him, and the life he used to have as Will Graham is a dream buried somewhere; replaced by the memory of a different Will squatting by his bathtub with a scalpel on his hand. Will stares at her to ask for permission to invade her heart. The blood slides down his arm as his hand is driven further inside until it finally touches the palpitating meat that sends tremors across his palm.

He shudders and pants in ecstasy.

The synchronization of both beating hearts acquires the same speed. Slow, steady, relaxed… gentle. They become one unique individual taking their own heart in hand to pull it out from the ever bleeding chest. It feels nice to be recalled how power feels like, how love can be presented when it is devotional.

Will holds her cheek with tender love and pulls out her pounding organ until she fades, leaving him alone in the office. She isn't far, his mind tells him, in spite of her absence she will find a way to show herself in other forms.

'*All you'll find is a dead girl on the shore of a beach, and a heart on a jar.'*

The box is still where he left it, untouched by his anxiety or violent reactions. It waits for him to cut its chest until the gift can come out–how poetic, just like her. His razor feels heavy and cool in his hand. It slides the tape without problem and some big balls of newspapers greet him from inside the box. A glistening ray reveals the golden lid of the jar hidden by the papers, it is heavy and large; the sound it produces when Will takes it out of the box is of water splashing against the walls of its confinement.

Jimmy was always in charge of the organ examination, and his fascination always caught Will's ears when he talked about deformities, injuries, diseases or variations in the different organs he ought to find in the corpses. It was good to be by his side and listen to every observation he had to make about them, it also helped him to create better profiles about the victims or the killers; he knows Jimmy actually liked the time they had together when he did that kind of things and he wasn't behaving like a jerk whose introversion made him a bit of an asshole *(in reality, his coworkers also liked that about him. They found him funny at times,*

and as long as they knew how to keep it cool, they hid pretty well the fact that they admired him from afar).

That means he has seen a lot of hearts before, of all ages and sizes, with problems or healthy, shot or complete. There is a big collection of them running in his mind and even when they all look the same, for him neither of them holds the same characteristics as the one in his possession.

Chiyo's heart is inside of the jar, floating in formaldehyde. The brown color of the liquid obscures the normal tinting of the organ floating inside; it is pale, gray, healthy, kind of small. The image of Chiyo tempting him to take her heart out it still very much fresh in his mind, so all he can feel is another contradictory dance between gratitude and a yearning to shout for help engulfing his thoughts.

The woman seems to tell him to keep it and treasure for it is the manifestation of the love someone feels for him, besides, he worked hard to obtain the beautiful thing and what he deserves is to be recompensated for his job. His been dreaming with it for a year now, he cried and missed having the opportunity to hold her so intimately between his fingers. The sole weight of his love is tangible in the bond he created with the imaginary organ and the enigmatic drug that kept him in the border of nirvana for so long. Chiyo tells him to keep it, because it belonged to her and then it belonged to him and all that is his is for Will.

Will feels loved again.

Even so, it isn't right. *It… isn't… what… he… was… made… for…* accepting the gift will be like giving *the others* the reason to believe he is precarious despite the hard work he has put into create a persona that anyone could approach to if they need to. Not satisfied with that, he has always repressed his behaviors in order to demonstrate that he is a good man. Accepting would be throwing away his wife's efforts to turn him into someone respectable.

So, what if it is the token of devotion from a man who promises acceptance? Alana accepted him first. Her fear can't be compared to the faith she has in him. The dreams of Chiyo dying on his hands not only brought him ecstasy, but they were also full of a guilt he had long forgotten because he is a new man, a clean man.

The punishing feeling grows in his guts like the seed of a tree destined to crunch and wring any bit of love he could have felt for him, any bit of envy that could have been provoked by his uncommon life.

As seconds pass, Will finds himself caught in a whirlwind of conflicting emotions.

THIS is what he desires, yet THIS is what he is afraid of. Think of the orchestra and the joy, chants Chiyo. Think of their lives, chants Alana. The conflicting needs to praise the heart and to get rid of it leaves him in a trance where he can see in some instances how the organ moves rhythmically to continue its job, part of a horrific game created by his mind to torture him.

The silence that surrounds him and his prize is cut by a loud laugh coming from downstairs and not by the cry for help still stuck in his larynx. Air feels heavy in his lungs and his own

heart plays painful games with its beats any time it gets squeezed till emptiness to then explode with a big charge of blood flooding it.

Will throws up in the little basket under his desk and he remains sitting in the floor so he can have easy access to the basket if he needs to puke. The horrid realization gave him a migraine he tries to calm down with pictures of places that bring actual peace to his body, any safe place will be ideal to exist until the people around him find him and solve the issues for him; nothing works, no image last long in his mind to distract him from the woman and the heart over his desk.

Alana or Beverly will come in any second now; they'll see the horrid scenario; he'll be forced to do the right thing and die for what is correct. *(He'll have to fight for what is righteously his)*.

Peace isn't an option for those who are constantly staring the eyes of the Death, he decides. Peace fades when it is most desired.

And it won't be back unless he does something to fix it.

The option is to give his friend the jar, return to Chiyo the heart someone took out of her chest, and let her whole body find peace by being together in the afterlife. It is hers… not *his* to take and treasure. Will convinces himself to stand up and hold the jar in his arms while he wishes it a good travel to the place it belongs. It is cold to the touch, heavy like the love it represents. *If only he could kiss it…*

THAT is what he needs to do. His life and the lives of others depend on him and his ability to deny himself the wonders he also carves for. It is simple, he has done it his entire life, there can't be anything different from all those instances, right?

So there is not a reason why he should take the jar and walk towards the decorative chest he has on his office, there is no reason for him to kneel and hide the heart in its obscure interior, and there is *definitely* not reason for him walk away as if he just hid a virus inside the wood box.

Will feels *offended* in some many different ways, and *so wrong, and so filthy…* regardless of the disgust and astonishment he is feeling, nothing stops him from hiding his letter in a hidden spot on his desk, away from Alana's curious hands and her growing obsessive need to leave everything shinning and perfect.

The papers leave a tickling feeling on his fingers that he can't hush away no matter how hard he cleans his palms on his jeans. The coordinates are still in the desk, expecting.

Chiyo tells him he as hypocrite for trying to fake having a conscious that can make him feel remorse when in reality he has been begging for some kind of miracle that could take him out of bed *for months*.

He's been looking at the news for more cases, waiting for Crawford to call and take him to a see another corpse, *dreaming of eating the young woman he killed every night.* As grewsome

as it was, it was a good experience that brought him a fake happiness for a little while to keep his brain from falling into desperation until it vanished and gave access to catastrophe.

Are you really satisfied working from home? Chiyo asks him.

Are you happy hiding at home when you know there is something bigger out there for you? She continues. Killing rabbits and hares will never be enough for you, they can't compare to criminals falling down as they grunt in pain.

This can't be happening, not to *him*. The surreal mistakes he committed in his past do not define him as a person, no one in the FBI is a saint compared to him and to people like him.

Giving her the chance to control your body so you can deliver your letter is a problem you don't have to confront because she is wrong, Alana says. Who cares if your mind produces some imagery that makes you feel uncomfortable?, she tells him with a comprehensive smile.

They aren't real. Besides, just two of the people you shot are dead so, who cares if you don't find satisfaction in your job if you can have the satisfaction that the number of people you saved is bigger than the number of people you hurt. The number of people your books saved, she adds, is bigger than the number of people you killed.

'Yes but doing the good thing will come with consequences I don't want.'

He scolds himself instantly by reminding himself that if he is not willing to lose his lifestyle to save other people–as bad as they are–then it is the same as surrendering to his game. For now, all he can do is stay at home, sleep and think of a solution tomorrow when he has rested a bit. Any negotiation he can do to keep his world intact as he plays to be a kamikaze will be established once he can sit and talk it with his wife. That's the best he can do, she'll find a solution and he'll keep her safe.

Will sighs loudly as he sits on his chair again. The envelope goes to the same place where his letter is kept, and his own letter is taken out to save it somewhere else. If he thinks about it, it was therapeutic to offend a murderer with a letter he will never read; no need to worry if it is never delivered since it can be a little secret meant to satiate his anger and fear.

The man takes his pen, the coordinates, and the letter in hand, he walks out of the office and locks the door so Alana or Beverly won't look for mere curiosity at the mysterious delivery. He is going to sleep, just a few steps and he will be in bed, comfortable. Safe and free.

Unfortunately, his body never lets him do what he wants when it recognizes chaos near him, the border that separates the two sides of his psyche will always crumble under pressure of all those antithetical fights that make him feel normal even if they don't last long. This is his curiosity moving him forward, towards the man who gave him a piece of his heart.

As he approaches the stairs he becomes aware of how the world is getting smaller and smaller the more he tries to rationalize what he is doing. Those are the exact same floors Will has walked a hundred times before, stairs where he has fought and run at a parallel time distant from his present and his future, both determined by the hand of a stranger. His personal Moira prophesizing his future.

A mortal weight slows his pacing with every step he takes until he drags his feet through the wood. He can hear his lungs closing and his heart hitting against his ears in a deafening rhythm that does nothing but cage him in a prison where the only thing he can hear are his words going on repeat in his mind. Sweat wets his body–at least he thinks it does– and at this moment he is sure he will faint any time soon, ready to receive the floor's hard impact on his head to disconnect his brain from reality.

His perception is disfigure by the shadows from the items and ornaments around the house walls which turn into a big soggy mass of colors similar to colorful clay being put together to make «rainbow color», gravity is playing a tipsy game with him aiming to make him stumble in every opportunity it gets. There is no longer a floor beneath him.

The grimace on his face shows itself full of incommodity and shock, and his letter turns into a cockroach dying in his hand, its feet still moving but incapable of moving due to its wings crushed and the liquids of its body working as glue on his palm.

In a slow pace he goes down to the living room where he finds his friend and his wife rattling about trifles that he can't understand. Alana must have offered him a glass of something because he nods as he takes sit on the couch contrary to the one they were sitting on. Beverly keeps talking about cats, movies and cheeses.

'What if he kills me for what I say? He'll jump on my back and stack his knife on my nape… I'm going to die there. I should tell Alana that I love her before I die. I know. I can't feel my legs and I'm going to vomit, what if I drown on my vomit before I even got there? Will he be satisfied with that? Surely no, his ego wouldn't be satisfied with knowing that his idol is mortal… Ha! His idol, since when I put that name on me… it is all Crawford's fault… ohgodIcan'tfeelanythingIthinkI'mfinallydyingmyheartwillexploitbeforeIknowwhathewantedfromme…'

Will is absent into his own mind, barely listening to whatever she has to say or the way his senses must behave, one salty cookie touches his mouth, yet it doesn't feel nor taste like one; it is dull, and the texture is pretty much sand-like. He drinks the glass of wine to pass it down, carefully not to spilt it or drink it too fast, it too tastes passed.

His sight unconsciously travels to the place where the fireplace is, off and without ashes. In front of it is a creature squatting over the corpse of another person.

'I hope one of these days You can live up to that feeling so You can recognize the beauty You hold in all that violence that resides in Your soul.'

«He sees his soul covered in the hot blood that splatters on his face and hair every time his fist falls with a brutal force that crushes into the victims skull. One hand around someone's neck to hold them down and to also feel the dropping rhythm of its heart, and his knuckles are red and open mixing the victim's blood and his own blood the more the skin breaks. There is something beautiful about seeing the victim's disfigured face, swelled and pounded here and there, it squeaks and hisses with difficulty as its nails sink on Will's arms to make him stop.

It can fight all it wants; it is granting for a man who actually enjoys the resistance and the pain inflicted by his prey.

The Will from his visions looks at him with a satisfied and playful smile; he pulls his tongue out, revealing a single fly that flies and walks on the edge of the glass Will is holding, the man eats his second cookie slowly; this time enjoying how the salt melts on his mouth before his teeth can start grinding it. Will takes the glass softly and raises it to his mouth, wine and fly travel down his esophagus without resistance; a pill waiting to fulfill its mission.

His mimic stands up and walks to him. His figure is the one of a confident, secure, strong, and powerful man who can simply walk as if others aren't in his way. He can push them if he considers it necessary, he can eliminate them if he is in the mood to smear his new clothes. He looks down at Will with contempt and rejection; Will on the contrary feels small and looks at him in awe. He is the same man Will has seen in his dreams when he looks at himself in the mirror after killing Chiyo. Familiar yet unknown.

They both turn to look at the one with its head stacked in one of the metal decorations of the chimney. Its face now a bowl full of residues of brain, muscle, blood and bones mashed up.

"It can't be eaten now." He says.

It *used to have a family,* it *used to be a worker and a boss,* it *used to be someone… and now* it *is just an* «it»*. Will shoves the last cookie on his mouth and drinks the rest of the liquid.*

"See?" The other him says. "See?"»

Will is relaxed in his seat. The world is back to normal, sharing its peace and the new bright colors that accompany its reality. In this world, Will doesn't have to fear consequences because they don't exist, the search for pleasure and pain is the only thing that matters and the world is a ball inside the pocket of his jeans.

Now there is nothing to «see» but he knows about *its* existence. He sees, he doesn't want to, though. The worst in recognizing himself in the man who become a murderer is to still be conscious in the body of a man who refuses to acknowledge the similarity, which gives place to fear and guilt. The world is back to its gray colors and it is too big to be his.

The glass shattering on the floor and the abrupt standing scare both women on the room. They look at him in awe before they stand to help him recover his balance. He shrugs them off with a quick movement, any contact at the moment feels like acid on his flesh.

"I'm okay." He says. Unsure if his voice is out loud or inside his mind. He repeats. "I'm okay."

A robotic force–that he obeys without much resistance–obliges him to walk to his car. Sounds and movements are invisible for him now that his brain has disconnected him from reality, henceforth all his +actions are commanded by the pure strength of his unconscious and its automatic pilot.

Neither Alana or Beverly tries to stop him from walking out until the car's engine starts but their shouts are muted to him; the shadow of his head–the one with the dress and the flowers smell–is drunk in power and excitement while he is drunk in fear, either way he is not stopping the drug that contaminates his life.

Someway he gets to make a circle on the ground to turn his car; mud and grass fly away when the back wheels rush over the ground, and he finally leaves. They don't follow him, but if they do he is not aware of their presence behind him.

In his internal vision he can see the road and the phone indicating the way for him to follow, a path to some unknown place for him that he doesn't remember tapping on the screen. There are clouds surrounding the borders of his eyes similar to a dream-like sensation and even the wheel under his fingers feels unreal.

After minutes–days, months, *years*–driving, all the world comes little by little into its normal state minus his breathing capacity. Whether the air feels heavy and hard to inhale or there is an obstruction on his nostrils preventing oxygen to make its way where it belongs, he finds no way to pull the air in entirely. His chest barely moves at his command, it is asphyxiating, the whole world becomes a suffocating weight pressing against his ribs to kill him slowly. *Like being under the swampy ocean.*

'You are not under water. You are in your car. You are safe, Will. Keep your eyes open and on the road.'

The back of his head feels heavy and his brain is not capable of forming a single coherent sentence, it is blank, silent and empty. Unconsciousness threatens to put his body down to sleep, uncaring of the possibility of drowning on his own vomit. He fights hard not to faint as he tries to regulate his breathing, the pressure on his grip over the wheel threatens to leave him with his hands stiffen for days.

He contributes to keep himself alert by biting the inner side of his cheek as hard as he can, so all it takes now is for him to wish upon a star that there won't be significative damage in his flesh.

Going back home is an option that he doesn't consider viable. Interrogations, investigations…they'll call the FBI. He doesn't want to explain. Whilst he tries to invent an excuse for his erratic behavior it has been finally decided that the only place he can go now is somewhere they don't know.

Calls behind calls get accumulated on his phone history. They all introduce names written in hieroglyphics that he can't comprehend.

'You're not coming back, right?' The voice of his friend appears quickly on his memory when the only name that he can recognize pops up.

'This is the only one.' He tries to convince himself after turning off his phone. *'I won't be back any more. I won't know about <u>him</u> anymore.'*

The landscape after the tollbooth is covered in pines and trees full of leaves, skies upholstered by a dark fabric that–thanks to light pollution–only shows a few stars on it. It is gloomy and the weather doesn't seem nice anymore, it has changed for a suffocating climate that will transform his sweat in vapor soon; although, the possibility of him being the problem is more than obvious; he is going to meet a killer, if he is lucky the «man» won't be there to slit his throat in fear of being arrested.

‘He would love that.’ Will tells himself. *‘If that means touching me.’*

The thought leaves as soon as it comes, making him shudder and frown with disgust.

After a turn he sees a warehouse. Old, moldy, abandoned. The damage caused by the aggressive weathers tells him that the building was there before he was born, occupied by crackheads and serial killers since the beginning of times.

He doesn’t get out of the car as soon as he arrives; the crushed letter on his pocket feels heavier than ever and the tickles grow on the tip of his fingers uncomfortably. The little place reminds him of the barn behind his house, the same place where he kept his tools and he made his own form of art; hands covered in oil and grease, black colors staining his clothing.

Five hours later he finally takes the courage to go out. The wind refreshes his body on the instant and the smell of pines and wood float around him like a subtle cloud of incense perfect to dance with the ambience. Will looks for a lamp he has on the back of his car, glad that it still has power when he turns it on.

The walls of the warehouse shine with a blue-gray light that reflects the illumination produced by his light, the windows are closed and covered with paper meanwhile the door seems to be open as an invitation.

With the lamp in one hand and the creased letter on the other, he walks to the entrance. His steps are steady, calm and long; he is alert, expecting any kind of trap from any corner or bush in his surroundings.

The door makes a squeaking sound when he opens it a bit more. He takes a quick inspection to the inside after turning to see the forest and his car for the last time.

From the entrance he takes his time to look at every detail on the warehouse, the action looks natural on him from all the training and his years entering in houses while looking for attackers; he didn’t used to go alone to question suspects, family or friends, the first two times that he did won him suspensions from the results of the investigations, the other three won him a letter telling him to go for his settlement and to never return.

Inside is warmer than it is outside. There are four tables on two different corners–two near the door and two on the corners–, mostly used in the past to build and fix and create; their present–he believes–is not that different from the past considering they are stilled used to *«create»*, but the meaning has change radically from productivity to bloodshed.

Another corner stores a greenhouse five inches smaller than the actual height of the warehouse, from its little windows Will can see different blurry plants. The green shades are accompanied by colors similar to the flowers used on Chiyo’s scene, some other are from plants he can’t recognize easily. On the last corner of the room–a few steps away from the white greenhouse–is a locked door that he doesn’t adventure to inspect.

He doesn’t have a gun and the sudden low of adrenaline taking control of his body puts him in the worst state to fight if he decides to appear from there, going further inside isn’t an option.

Apart from the disorder that the plants may make inside the greenhouse, the place seems clean and neat. There are no tools on the floor or rusty chains on the ceiling–as he had expected from his experience watching horror movies–even the tables have a lack of dust over them. And the old wood looks strong enough to keep the place on its feet. If one discards the flowers as part of evidence, there is not much around the room that may look suspicious or important to be catalogued as proof against him.

It is a place for actual storage rather than a place to hide any victim or evil plan.

'Annie Winkle's Happy Place.' He thinks once his eyes are focused on the only thing he finds odd in the room.

Abandoned in one of the tables next to the door is a coffer. It is a small, strong pink box locked by a golden lock. It looks like one of those jewel-boxes that pass from generation to generations, a piece of exquisite handmade wood, polished and decorated to demonstrate its high cost. The color that paints its exterior comes from the wood itself. He knows that kind of wood, it is expensive and hard to get due to the rareness of its three.

A bunch of keys rest by its side, one for the main door, one for the box and one for the door he doesn't want to open yet. They are his third gift of the night if he counts the letter as a present. He is right to suspect that he has the other pairs at home, maybe in an altar made for Will, full of pictures, the cases he used it to work in, his books and the organs he took from the other victims served in ornamental plates like sacrifices for a cannibalistic God.

Will considers taking the box and the keys to Beverly or Crawford so they can look for any fingerprints around their surfaces.

Before he can agree with this conclusion his hands are already touching the shiny surface of the box with extreme curiosity. It is smooth and cool; the lock feels easy to break so he guesses he has no worries to be discovered. He doesn't fear that someone would enter and out of curiosity take the precious box thinking that there might be something important in it.

Will puts the lamp on the table in a way the angle can illuminate the lock and the keys being introduced in its little entrance to then produce a loud sound that echoes on the place. The box is empty, its interior is decorated with engravings painted with gold, blue and red, just like the cover of his books. The letter fits perfectly on the bottom. It doesn't have an envelope and it looks so out of place with all its stains, wrinkles and folds. A clear difference between him and the monster he created.

Will signs his name on the back of the letter; down the last paragraph he wrote. Even the comparison between his calligraphy and the killers calligraphy is abysmal and fun to watch, every trace on every line is full of each owners' personalities. He locks the lock and puts the keys in the pocket of his jeans.

'*I would like to share every detail of my work with You. After all, You deserve to know the truth before anyone else since You are the creator of this tragedy that keeps us entertained.'*

With this a vision of Chiyo sitting on the bean chair *(her head leaning to the side and her sight lost in the painting only they can see)* comes through the corner of his eye. For months

he wished to see her again, her flesh still full of blood and grease and the dress falling to the floor covering the chair on its entirety. He got depressed when he stopped offering that drug he got so used to, he almost killed himself that evening thinking of Chiyo and her executioner just because he was desperate.

So what was stopping him now from fulfilling that desire of meeting him again?

The letter definitely was a good punch in the face that took him out of his moody cloud, and maybe–just maybe–acknowledging the power he has to get closer to him is what makes him remember all the things he supposedly stands for.

A «man» capable enough to work with others just to achieve his goals, is dangerous. Capable of destroying everything he loves if that means knowing his idol and discovering the darkness Will tried so hard to hide, is powerful. And that beauty is exactly why this is the last time, the only letter.

On the other corner of his eyes–product of the imagination of a man with his brain profoundly divided in black and white–he sees the other three victims. Two women and one man facing the killers that stand side by side; one has a 'I' incision on her abdomen, the others are sewn by their half, and they are all naked, bestial, unafraid of being seen without their armors. They were humiliated in life, why should they remain ashamed in death?

But Chiyo wasn't, she was loved and respected. He couldn't hurt her like that, he couldn't give her the same treatment they had because he wasn't ashamed of her in the same way he isn't ashamed of Will.

'She is different from the scum.'

The three on his left stare at him with hope that impulses him to take the box on his hand, take the letter to his house and bring them justice. They weren't good people, but neither is him and yet he is alive, and if he is still alive when some many had die then the logic thing to do was to help them find the peace that was took from them–if they deserve it or not is another story, what he should be caring about is how to take him down.

On the other side of the ring is Chiyo with a soft and amicable smile, offering a hand for him to take and leave the warehouse without looking back and without anything on his hands but the little lamp that now has abandoned them in total obscurity.

Will tries to forget them by forcing himself to lock the box and take his lamp.

'I think that if she had ever been able to look at her own body after her death, she would've also felt powerful in the way I did by standing in front of her to take the picture.' Will gets it, *she* would've love it.

He is about to touch the door knob when his body turns three times; the first is done with the intention to return to the box, the second to leave, and the third is done with decision settle on his thoughts. Will returns and opens the box again.

'Even our letters are so different. We would never agree with each other.' He writes rapidly below his name.

He locks the box again and walks out of the building to be welcome by the hot wind that started to blow minutes ago.

That type of angry weather is exactly what he needs to keep his mind from going to the place where the four of them wait patiently for the change of heart. Three of them sad, one of them smiling victorious. Will couldn't care less, he promised Alana not to be near any other murderer, and he was willing to leave everything in the FBI hands and leave the country with his wife before facing him.

Now he needs to plan an excuse for his sudden leave, buy something for his wife, and go home wishing that she isn't mad enough to leave him alone once more.

Up in the sky he can see clouds twirling around, a storm comes with them announcing to cover the streets and alleys with its water, clean the putrid odors from the streets and baptize that little acolyte of his before he goes out to the dark to hunt down other victims.

He has missed the rain and the feeling of being stab by them when his hand goes out of the window to feel the drops crushing against the skin. It was raining when they met, too. Two storms in less than four hours formed an ominous aura around Will and the murderer, *a faith thread connecting their necks*. The more one of them tried to pull to leave, the more it choked the other. At least Will feels choked by a man whose face he doesn't know.

It is his moral what makes him walk to the car, start the engine and drive towards his home. It is morality what makes him turn and drive to Quantico with the hope that Crawford will be there so he can confess and tell him his plan to catch the killer no matter if that means putting his life in the line.

But it is his body and his primal instinct what makes him turn once more and drive back to the warehouse; it is his unconscious that shows him the images of Chiyo's body and the crime scene and the memories of the night they met; it is his own depravity what makes him park, go into the place once more wishing the killer isn't there, and open the box.

He draws a big 'X' across both faces of the paper, and with trembling hands he writes 'Show me.'

It is Will who drives home with empty hands and the new task to look out for a lock in his barn.

Will knows Hell is real. He is already there; it isn't a hot place that smells like sulfur and methane. Hell is having dreams of a dead woman who enjoys being open once and again by his own hands, Hell is finding pleasure on the idea of putting his fangs into her flesh. Hell is being stuck in a problem that anyone would find easy to answer, over all, after pleasuring the idiotic «man» who is obsessed with him. He won't ask for the forgiveness he doesn't deserve, nor he has the right to tell the victims to fuck off and leave him alone.

Hell is a house that doesn't feel like his anymore and is full of the presence of a person that doesn't love him like she used to do. Hell is a being an alien to his own persona. Hell is a hangover that drills into his brain.

Before the sun comes out, Will forces himself to go to the bathroom where he stripes entirely, the pain drilling his head tells him it will be better once he can rest under the warm, fresh water even if he is not in the mood for a bath.

The sound of water hitting the bottom of the bathtub and the pain silence his thoughts for a while. He enters when it is half full and slides all the way to the bottom until the first bubbles of air escape his nostrils. When he thinks it is opportune, he closes the faucet and slides again to the bottom.

Minutes go by, minutes in which he sees a woman completely covered in fine fabrics and wearing gold. So alive in his memories and so extinguished in real life. He has to remember himself that Chiyo was a murderer, a serial killer who might have gotten the country terrorized and who lived under the FBI's nose. She deserved to be judged according to the law and the crimes committed by her thin and small fingers.

Now that he thinks of it, her ending would have been the same according to the same laws he wanted to believe in so much. With a chair holding a cold corpse.

Will watches the crime scene again and again in his imagination, to try to discover something in it that tells why it is so addictive to revive her last hours of life. And when he can't find anything, he thinks of the body before that one, and the one before that one, and the one before that one, and...

And then he sees his mother. Gray/blue skin covered in hematomas and injuries in critical places; purple, red, and yellow definitely suited her better.

She was found on rigor mortis, after the water washed her away from the bridge she jumped from. He was barely a teen when his father forced him to go to the mortgage and see her; in his own words (different from the lies he told to the coroner), it was a lesson for his son so he could stop his disgusting and growing fascination for the death.

His father was convinced all that drama was forgotten once he knew Will was working at Quantico, finally doing something of productivity with his weird pleasures and odd «psychic magic», not knowing that in reality he was responsible for the way Will's mind turned out to be when he was obliged to live alone with himself. Will didn't learn a lesson about how dying was scary. He learned a lesson about how death was wonderful, and with that, he also learned how to hate himself.

The autopsy said she had been drunk, her neck broke, and a rock hit her head, causing a lot of internal and external bleeding. There was no way she could've survived but Will wished she did even if that meant having her paralyzed. Her dead was more humane–and as much as the idea bother him, economically efficient too–but Will was a kid and he still needed his mommy.

They didn't have the decency to close her eyes. Well, is better to say that that's how Will remembers the scenario; her big, blue eyes open and looking at the white light on the ceiling of the mortgage. He stared into her eyes, once full of life but so empty of love for him. He didn't cry or told her goodbye despite the sadness that surrounded him. For what? His father would have punched him for whining so he could man-up and his mother wouldn't have listen… maybe he should have done it, to feel for a moment that nothing really hanged once she was gone.

Containing his grief in front of his father only elevated the rage he felt against the woman who wasn't brave or strong enough to keep going. Because she left him. Because she didn't take him with her. *And because she left him with the same curse of fear as a ruler in their lives.*

As months went by, it all changed to long hours of silent sobs blaming himself because he hadn't seen it, and hence he couldn't save her. Little Will wasn't important enough to keep her alive, he wasn't worth to be seen and to be taken care of.

In this moment–with his head covered in the now completely cold water, with his heartbeat going lower and lower, and his limbs and lips going blue–he feels closer to his mother; he doesn't tremble at the sensation of the cold stinging his skin, for it was the same temperature that once embraced his mother and guided her to the other side.

Will cries now for her, the tears mix with the water and his sobs let go of the oxygen in his lungs. He hates her, oh, how he hates her and misses her. Because he was just a kid, and it wasn't her fault. She didn't ask to be that way, and he didn't ask to recognize the corpse of his mother. She didn't wish to produce a killer, nor he wished to become one. Destiny hadn't been nice on either of them.

When the asphyxia becomes unbearable he finally takes his nose out to the surface. His emotionless eyes burn holes in the light green tiles while he waits for something, *anything* to happen. He knows that his problems are to wait for others to solve his crisis instead of doing something about them, *(but if we are frank the options he has don't look good for him)*.

Would his mother have felt happy when he was accepted into the academy? Would she have felt proud of him now that he was a writer? Would she have rejected him again because of his gift? Would she have felt surprised too when he got married because apparently someone was brave enough to love him?

Through the bathroom's window he can see the morning coming. It paints the sky with yellow and salmon colors that mix in the horizon until the new sun starts showing signs of bringing the blue sky behind it. That is his own sign to go out of the bathtub before Alana wakes up.

The mirror shows a reflection that concords more correctly with Will's self-perception. Will smiles at himself without much conviction and without expecting something in return from the real him. He had tried to make peace with himself before, he has tried to accept what he sees there and to love who he is. He used all the selflove propaganda that people sold him so easily as if it were a «three in one product» until he got exasperated and realized that maybe all the selflove-sellers around him that had achieved that grandiose revelation that led them to

the spiritual illumination didn't live with a mind that enjoyed watching rabbits die a little bit too much.

Once he dresses, Will walks downstairs feeling Belphegor clinging from his back with a tight hug, it is gross now even more with his hangover and the summer weather making him sweat at first hour in the morning. The need to vomit is inviting him to let himself go in every pot around the house. Opening the door for his dogs to go out is as hard as trying to avoid dismaying in the porch; each child of his jumps carelessly and freely until they are lost in the woods and Will returns to the kitchen with a satisfied smile.

There are a lot of things that differentiate him from his wife, for starters is the coffee preparation. Will likes his coffee black, she prefers milk in it with two teaspoons of sugar; he doesn't like sweets a lot, but he does his best not to judge her choices. The differences can be followed by their secrets, for him Alana is an open book that he pretends not to read, whilst he is for her a book she pretends to understand even when the language is completely foreign. More than foreign, it isn't a language but a code he won't translate for her.

Not when his peaceful life is at risk because he decided to play the game someone invited him to play. So, surely he can simulate he is living in an open marriage and that he doesn't know anything about her love affairs if that *keeps her* away from the warehouse and the letters and the *plan (he doesn't have a plan, he just needs to pretend he has one and eventually it will be shown to him)*. Besides, she is less anxious since she started dating someone else, doesn't he want what is best for her?

Will loves her, certainly, he gets jealous when she is not home and sometimes a little bit too sad till the point of thinking about killing himself just to provoke on her something, *(this behavior shouldn't be compared to whatever happened in the bathtub five years ago or the moment with the gun in his office. For those he has the criminals to blame)*, but he would never dare to say something about the elephant in the room. He doesn't want her to get sad or feel guilty for living a life he can't give her.

An alarm resonates through the wood walls and Alana's footsteps are audible from upstairs a few minutes later, they are heavy and slow as they direct her to the bathroom and her warm water. The door closes and the motor of a car starts its apparition in the distance. Will lows the fire on the stove before leaving it and walks to the entrance.

His dogs have come from anywhere, all ready to receive the man that walks out to announce the bad news. He looks tired, and Will can guess that he looks similar with his sweatpants and the towel around his shoulders and the deep marks below his eyes and the pale-sick skin. He is sure Crawford notices it, but he won't say a thing for the sake of his goal.

Will walks outside to welcome him until the idea of having Crawford close to him after having established communication with a killer makes his stomach protests, vomiting in an empty pot near the porch stairs. The colony of ants living there will surely have a banquet.

'He knows.'

"That isn't something I wanted to see this early."

Crawford pats his back gently. *'There, there,'* the pats say.

"At least I made it all the way outside–" He vomits once more. "I thought I was going to do it on the sink,"

Vomit again.

"Your night was good, huh? You really gave a good show." Says Crawford, he scrunches his nose with disgust. "I won't ask you were you went to but the least I can do is to reprimand you for scaring those two like that. I tell you my wife wasn't happy to hear so many calls on her free day."

"You should have brought her here; we would have had a splendid time emptying my reserve." Will shoves one of his dogs away from the pot so it can't try to eat the contents of his stomach. "I didn't want to wake up."

"You were drinking all night?" Crawford passes him a napkin that Will doubts using.

"*No, Jack. I just felt like vomiting*." He cleans his mouth softly. Lowly he adds as he takes the napkin: "What a gentleman."

When he is on his two feet and completely satisfied with the *warm* welcome he just gave to his former boss he says. "Is everything okay?"

"I wouldn't be here if everything was okay." Miraculously, Will chuckles when he hears this. It does sound forced.

"Yeah, I guess not... I just made coffee, so wait here and we can talk about it." He turns slightly before Crawford stops him.

"My feet are killing me, Will. I was up all night from scene to scene." Will's eyes narrow when he stares at Crawford. It is a quick but effective way to show his intentions. "Ah, is not that you *don't want me inside*. *You just don't want me near you*… Listen, I understand, but I really want to rest somewhere comfortable. My back isn't the same it used to be."

"Alana is inside." Will explains. "She will kill you if she knows you are here for a case, and I will have no other option than help her hide the body."

"That is exactly why they fired you, Will. That mouth of yours will be your perdition one of these days."

Will shrugs and moves to let him in before Alana can appear with his riffle and drive Crawford away with brute force. The nearness Crawford causes when he walks in is enough for Will to reconsider telling him everything he did yesterday. He is tempted to drag Crawford all the way to the warehouse and show him the letter he wrote if it is still there.

'My plan is to make a connection with the killer. I can lure him to show himself. With time I can win his trust, look for clues or any minimum thing that can give us an identity and find a way to link him with the case.' He would have said.

'We can use this place to catch him. I can convince him to reveal everything. How? I don't know. He loves me. I know it is suicidal but, does that really matter? I have done suicidal things before… I'm not talking about that. *We can't tell others, or the press will find out and they will ruin everything… well, I wrote it like that because I need him to see that I'm in conflict and all that.'* He would have attack Crawford out of fear if he didn't believe in Will's pathetic excuse.

After he goes to the kitchen and prepares another round of coffee for Alana, he returns to the living room to sit in front of Crawford, both cups on the little table and the only thing Will hears is the mumbling sounds coming out of his superior's mouth. He drinks the first sip of liquid from his cup and the burning touch on his tongue takes him out of his internal dialogue.

"You could be helping people, you know?"

It takes him a bit to comprehend what was Crawford saying. The look in his face is severe and dry, he is not here for a «no» as an answer.

Will scowls.

Yes, he knows. He knows that he could be solving puzzles and catching bullets for others but instead he is malnourished due to his depression and uptight because he has just decided–again–to keep his mouth shut and not tell anyone about the letters. Not that his past life was any different, but he at least had a motive to wear himself out like this in order to do something good.

Will answers with a strain smile before leaving his place on the couch; the new round of coffee is ready when he gets to the kitchen. Crawford follows him immediately, taking a seat on one of the counter chairs so Will can't escape him, when Will offers him a refill while he waits for his own coffee to cool down Crawford shakes his head.

There are other things that differentiate him from his wife. She is excellent at convincing people to do what she wants.

He had suspected her of being a potential manipulator herself when he discovered how she tried to convince him of leaving the FBI (unsuccessful) and how she convinced Prunell of firing him because of his *«instability in crime scenes»*; it was for his own good, they told him, to avoid transforming a half sane man into a completely insane one. At the end he got to the conclusion that the best thing to do with her savior complex traits was to let her explore them with him; she was good to him, either way… maybe a *little too good*.

Now, is not like she is a psychopath or a manipulator, she just has a strong personality and clear limits unlike him. The traits are just traits that every living person has and that aren't hurtful to him or others, so he never said anything about them.

The coffee burns his throat in a delicious pain that is more than welcome so it can suffocate his lungs and melt his intestines, and the warmth embraces his body so slowly he feels feverish for a moment. Alana's footsteps are heard once again from upstairs, both men follow them with their eyes stuck to the ceiling.

“The last time I worked saving people I ended up on suspension because I shot someone.” Will adds after they are sure Alana is on the room.

Will remembered his time in the interrogation room after that.

His sight lost in the distance imagining the river behind his house and the texture of the fishing rod on his hands, smooth and cold and light. Beverly described it as necessary thing to do, the suspect was supposed to surrender calmly so she could arrest him, but he decided to hit her and run against the other suspect under Will’s charge. Will shot with the «intention» *of hitting his calf but instead he hit the man’s lung on «accident», three times. The bad thing was that there were too many «accidents» involving Will and with Alana’s reports describing how her husband didn’t belong to the field, everyone started getting suspicious.*

When Crawford came in to talk to him, his voice sounded like nothing but a lament in the distance. Emotions left Will’s brain and blurry images floated in front of his pupils on a monochromatic flow that was interrupted sporadically by total blackness. The memory of the man’s blood bubbling out of his chest came on repeat into his mind, and the squeaks of pain almost made him smile in satisfaction against his will. He hurt Beverly, and Will wanted to suck the bullets out of his lung.

They let him go with suspension whilst they debated the importance of having him in crime scenes. He wasn’t sorry, nor regretful although his verbal statement showed the contrary. They also took that on consideration.

Maybe that was what Alana saw in him and told her to ask for the end of his career.

“*And I* advocated on your favor, Graham!” Crawford stops him before he can even take another sip of coffee. “I need you again. *We* need you as a consultant on the case, to tell us if it is the same killer that goes behind you or not.”

Will laughs dryly, a part of his brain is insisting he should tell him to go away and never come back, that he doesn’t want to see a copycat’s work. The other tells him to listen carefully, that this time it is <u>him</u>, <u>he</u> is back. He can *«see»* <u>him</u> again.

The men drink the last parts of their beverages. The footsteps are coming down.

“So, I guess there is nothing you can do with that. Jimmy can be a little stubborn sometimes if you don’t know how to conquer his heart.” Will says out of nowhere. Crawford follows almost immediately.

“How am I supposed to win his heart back if he doesn’t stop having kids.”

God blesses Beverly for telling him every gossip going inside the Bureau.

“It is just the third one. Convince Beverly and Brian to *convince him* to stop having them. He has a soft spot for them. He’ll listen.” His voice starts to fade when Alana enters the kitchen.

The smile she gives him is radiant, beautiful. Made not for him, but for Crawford to see, nonetheless, he is glad he is the first one to notice. His greeting comes out of his mouth like a whisper that flows to her ear.

Alana approaches them. A hand on Will's shoulder and the other holding her bag. She kisses him gently. He wants to tell her that he won't break but the words can't come out of his mouth, she is already taking to Crawford. "Catching up with Will?"

"Sort off. I needed a break and he happens to do the best coffee in town." He responds by raising his cup.

"So I guess this has nothing to see with the kidnaps." She crosses her arms on her chest. Will looks small on her side, but a glimpse of power and curiosity grows in him immediately.

'She knows.' Beverly must have told her when Will disappeared. Maybe that was the real reason why his friend had been calling him so insistently while he decided to ignore her.

Crawford doubts it before answering, his eyes traveling from Will to Alana for any help that could stop her from ruining his plans. Will shrugs uninterest on his decision, completely interest in the disappearances. If Beverly wanted to convince him and Alana was trying to *«protect him»* then there was the probability of Crawford *knowing beforehand* that it was him.

Saying he needs Will to recognize if it is him, is the same as saying: I know it is him, but why do it like this?

'He has a peculiar cleverness.' Told him a blonde girl he used to work with. (Where is she now?)

Of course Crawford has it, but he doesn't know how to use it properly.

The old man's shoulders fall softly and the air coming from his nose is loud.

"A woman and a man. Different times, different days, different body shapes, ages… everything on them is different. There is no traceable connection between them. She disappeared seven days ago, found yesterday; he disappeared two days ago, found yesterday too. We believe is the same killer because they present the same execution. The times are almost similar to the first round, and they are two of your paintings too. *«Abandoned»* by Luigi Nono and, *«Soir Bleu»* by Edward Hopper but just the clown."

"And you were hoping Will would follow you to–"

"The decomposition state was advanced?" Will interrupts Alana. *'Why didn't he mention that he is back?'*

Crawford nods, uncaring about the indignation that flows out of Alana. "There is also another difference that divides them from the first victims: *the profiles don't match*. Both victims were respectable, good lives and good reputations. Unless they were killers in their free time too I don't see why he would be so interested in them."

Chiyo chuckles.

"He isn't a vigilante judging people by their actions. Those things about good or wrong lives don't matter to him." Will answers softly. '*There are some things that are unspeakable rude and ugly to me',* he remembers. His feet tickle with the need to run to his desk and take out the letter. Chiyo smiles for him. "If he chose them was because he believed of them as nothing but a mistake. With that type of ego no one is save. Every single movement could be offensive to him if he considers so… what did he took?"

Alana squeezes his shoulder softly to take him out of the trance he put himself in. "Will, darling, you can't be thinking to go. Right?"

He looks at her like a puppy looks at his owner after eating the chicken they told it not to eat.

"There is no brain on the «homeless» woman, no lungs, liver and a big piece of the flesh on her back. The «clown» didn't had the heart, stomach and the right calf. They were both naked with the exception of some *decorative* clothes." Crawford answers before Alana can even protest.

"NO! STOP! I don't want to hear anything else coming from *you*." Alana growls, her index finger pointing at Crawford. It is a voice full of so much anger that keeps Will attentive to her words. "I don't want him getting hurt, I don't want him near of any murder! I always told you not to put him out there, he gets too close and you do nothing to avoid it and in the end I have to sleep with a killer on my bed because Will talks about murders in his sleep. The last time he went there he couldn't stop vomiting."

'Ah. So you noticed.'

"He was saving lives! He has the higher rate on crimes resolved in less time." Crawford growls back. "Not only that, but we also can't pretend that these doesn't involve him personally. Solving the case promptly means saving himself and saving you."

"He was saving your ass! Saving lives, *saving our own lives*, is the same lame excuse you used to lure him into seeing more corpses, to smell another place like a good dog, to keep himself awake until the hallucinations started. But who the fuck is there to save *him*? No one!" A soft red color paints Alana's cheeks. She is mad from her skin to her bones. "I am tired of him coming home smelling of rotten meat, Jack!"

Will catches a sigh before it can go out. One of the things he didn't want was to talk about anything at all when he was recovering from the binge he applied on himself. His peace consists in the silence that those around him can supply him, but he has no right nor power to tell people to remain silent at this exact moment.

He looks at Crawford with a frown for what he says next, but he lets them continue without interruption.

"*And still, he stayed*. Because he knows it is true. *We all* know that it is true." Crawford closes his hand in a fist. He is trying not to raise his voice yet the burst vein on his forehead gives that ire away. "I don't know why you worry so much about Will. I have seen more

humanity in him than in any of those people I have put on prison, he won't break just because a few people think he is *weak*. Will has shown to be different from what even he thinks of himself," *'When?'* "he is a good man, and a fucking grown up!"

Will looks at the kitchen windows. He can't handle the light coming from them as it stings his corneas with desperation and the regret of having drink too much encourages sweat to fall from his forehead. He also sees the three victims standing side by side outside the windows, expecting him to tell or not tell everything to Crawford.

(Please, mercy for him and the pain in his head.)

The agent is there, a few inches away from him, splitting saliva and popping his fingers out of anger and desperation. It is too early, in his opinion, to be talking about work and things he may feel guilty about or not. It's also petty from his brain to show him hallucinations from the people he is betraying because he is silent like a monk.

His plan for that morning was to take a walk in the forest after eating the leftovers from the food Beverly did and he couldn't eat, take the dogs to the veterinary and write anything that could come into his mind before Georgia threatened to hang him if he didn't do anything good. Buying wax, envelopes and something to be his own seal were also options.

He wanted to be alone and not in a room where his wife and his former boss are trying to convince each other about what is best for him like divorced parents fighting for the custody.

'No peace for the man who wears the devil's clothes, no redemption for the man with meat on his molars.' He thinks. *'None of them knows I was trying to kill myself yesterday, and now they are worried about my future.'*

He hides a chuckle behind a yawn that soon turns into a grimace of revulsion. He doesn't know if it is the hangover or the guilt he feels when he sees the image of the corpses starting to bloat and decay to make him feel bad but there is definitely a pressure forming on his stomach.

"God!" She shouts. The red on her cheeks extends to her chest: it gets darker. Alana looks like a child on the edge of throwing a tantrum. "This isn't about Will's humanity! This is about his sanity. You are right, he stayed because he was useful, but that doesn't mean he has to sacrifice himself for others. *For you!*"

Time doesn't come to his favor. He throws up on Alana's shoes.

It's been a week after Crawford's visit and the day he left the letter in the warehouse, an entire week to give <u>him</u> time to take out the letter, read it, rage and curse over Will's linage and finally write <u>his</u> own response.

When he is too distracted in his life, he can't help but wander on the corner reserved for <u>him</u> *(it appeared one day out of nowhere when the dream of Chiyo still produced on him*

something funny, it didn't disappear after she did and from then on, he walks there when he is distracted).

It is a gallery with walls in colors olive green and white, holding frames with exquisite paintings in different art styles; there are some tall shelves full of colorful books with empty covers, some showcases and wood cabinets hand carved with thousands of delicate details representing flowers, animals and sceneries that contain ancient medical tools and human organs in formaldehyde. It also smells like disinfectant.

Will is sure he has put a lot of expectations to build this place, but it is rather nice to hang around when he is inclined to break his abstinence to see if his letter is already at the warehouse.

That place on his mind is in the top of the world, although he is not sure ***he*** would like that type of things. Big mansions and apartments in the top of the buildings are ready to show wealthiness, luxury and power, even if that fits him perfectly, Will discards it every now and then. Sometimes big houses can be poor houses, and the apartments on top of some buildings swing when the air hits them. For him, they are nothing but the results of humans intentions of building Babel Towers, trying to reach God without any success.

But what is a tower for someone who recognizes himself as God themselves?

'*Surely not something with feelings but something that is so close to humans he can comprehend them.'*

Yes, he would definitely like an elegant house that looks like the others but feels unique at its core. Something that shows his power without giving too much of himself away. He needs to be like the rest if he wants to keep his game of charades.

At the end, he rejected Crawford's offer to be part of the investigation unless there was something that could link him as an individual directly to the case. Alana left for two days– her friend's baby was at the hospital for a fever–but even when she did was at home she felt distant and strange.

He couldn't blame her for that. He is back and the presence of Crawford stalks their house like a ghost. And to add more unconformity, he threw up in her shoes right in the middle of an argument with one of the people she least tolerates.

What is good about his life is that he doesn't need to wear shoes if he doesn't want to. Benefits of working from home. And he doesn't need to be early to work because, again, he works from home. He rarely leaves his place unless it is because Alana forced him or because he needs to do something related to his dogs or run some errands for his usual boat-costumers. When Georgia wants to see him, she goes to his place or calls him if it is necessary.

And when Will has to deal with hideous people that made him wish his wife took his word of leaving the country after his dismissal so *she* couldn't find him… he stays home, and drinks more than he usually does.

Freddy is the Leucochloridium parasite that infects snails to make them zombies. And because she is so slippery, he has hate and fear and respect for her. They are always ready to jump to each other's neck, and she is the only person his wife doesn't want to deal with so Will is the one in charge of attacking her with no mercy.

«Is good to know that our favorite psycho is back on the game. He has proved that serial killers or depression aren't enough to do something he has been trying all along… kill him. We expect to listen more from our next Carl Pazram and his marvelous adventures capturing the people of his own kind. Graham is the living evidence that rejection of our own darkness makes us project our flaws on others, and since he can't put himself in prison, he makes others take their place in the death row. We can only pray for the day he finally stains his fingers with blood. The bets are open.»

This was a good one, not her best but a good one like the one she wrote when he was fired:

«The city is safe from Will's instability, yet the city runs a big danger now that Will is free to do what he pleases without being stopped by his so called «coworkers»*. The fact that he can go home at the end of the day while the victims of his crimes are under ground or in little urns is a scandal the FBI needs to take more seriously. Is this really our institution of confidence? Are we safe in our sleep knowing that* they *couldn't prevent him from becoming* <u>*this*</u>*? I think we aren't, so you better start working on your aim because this man definitely knows how to empty his gun in someone's chest.»*

Sometimes he wishes he could concede her the pleasure of having the reason. And, by the time she could realize she was right, it would be too late to run. A well-kept secret between them till the end.

"I can't believe Jack Crawford hasn't come to you asking for help. There is a new serial killer in town, and you are simply bed-rotting." She says dryly as the wine in her glass. The little notebook slides from her hand to his coffee table.

"Take it or leave it." He answers in the same way. "I thought you would have preferred me rotting somewhere instead of having me catching killers."

Freddy looks at him with disdain. Her thin brown curves up. "Yeah, well… you were my mine of gold when you were getting your hands dirty. Serial killers these times are tasteless and the only person we were betting on was fired from the FBI."

"Cry about it." Will looks at the wrinkles that form on the sides of her eyes when she smiles, sardonic, of course. "If it gives you any comfort, I am banned from the institution, so I'm not allowed to be inside unless it is to give testimonies. Do something with that."

"No. Is more fun when you are in the edge, losing your mind… so, are you sure Jack hasn't called you in any crime scenes? Because I have pictures of you on that abandoned store."

Will opens his eyes and finally dares to sit properly to look at her little nose. Leaving the comfort of his bed/coach pains him but right now is more important to put himself in the right position to fight.

“Are you *fucking* stalking me again?”

“Nope, I was just there doing my job. I always go to all crime scenes to see if someday I can spot you committing your own crimes.” She sips the las bit of her wine and pours more into the glass. “And I happened to see you walking in and rushing out behind your wife after your *little paranormal session*. There is nothing illegal in that.”

“Ah, I hope you keep doing that because that is the perfect statement to consider you author of any murder you have been investigating.”

“I have perfect alibis and too much evidence to prove my innocence, *you on the contrary*… you spent so much time in crime scenes that you keep smelling like shit and putrefaction.” She tucks a piece of hair behind her ear, the holes that Will is burning on her shoulder aren’t enough to keep her quiet. “Like your bad luck, it follows everywhere you go.”

“Is not that different from being near you. Obsession with the dead is not normal, Freddy. You wouldn’t want people thinking that their favorite tattle writer is the type four of necro.” He says and smirks mockingly at the way she rolls her eyes.

Lounds starts to insult him, but he couldn't care less. The man just stares at the window behind her, trying to decipher a way to get rid of her as soon as possible. If it weren’t for her, he would have been returning home with a new letter on his hand, or maybe with a big sad face full of deception… or *happiness* because that would meant the killer was no longer interested. Whatever it was, now he wouldn’t know because she was there, printing the shape of her red lips on the edge of her wine glass.

He needs to break it and burn it outside once she is gone.

To deny that he wasn’t waiting for the right time to return to the warehouse since Crawford told him about the disappearances would be like trying to stop a lactose intolerant person from consuming lactose; *useless*.

His brain reasoned that it was his cue to go out and look into the box just to be sure that his own creation was still on the game even after the terrible things he put on the paper. And with one full week of solitude he finally came to the plan he was looking for: lure him, meet him, kill him. With the police looking in other direction and with the letters being unknown to the population, all he needs is to do is the hard work so he can keep his own secrets… *secret*.

No police in his house, no questions, no Alana worrying about his behavior after watching tableaus, and no anonymous writer revealing his identity. Easy peasy.

The first one to find the other wins. And all Will needs is a clue that tells him *who* told <u>him</u> that Will is <u>his</u> favorite writer.

“Then, why are his tableaus inspired by that mysterious author? Think he knows something about them?” She asks out of nowhere. “Is it because psychos attract each other?”

The question goes directly to his stomach like an arrow that transforms into something unbearable and heinous, it is an unusual and uncomfortable statement similar to the revelation of a *«well-kept»* secret.

“What makes you think the writer has something to do here?” He pours more wine into his glass. “They may have wrote about murders and serial killers but that doesn’t make them any guilty of what happened. Art inspires emotions, the mind over said emotions.”

Freddy shrugs. “It will if police catch him and he decides to say it was coercion. *«He wrote and I killed, it was the perfect propaganda».* I mean, have you seen their statistics lately!? People are buying their books like crazy, is the best way to profit with assassination!”

Will was more than aware.

Georgia called him crying once because she felt too bad about what was happening. In her own words, they were supposed to entertain the masses, not to kill them. And the victims, she said, the victims are being used like toys or martyrs. People on the internet were recreating their murders as cosplays just to idolatrize both killer and writer. And with every passing day, the digits on sales and on his back account were increasing little by little.

That was decisive for him. He needs to catch his creature before it can claim to be Will’s master.

“And of course, there is the public cheering up the FBI.” Freddy continued. “If they catch the killer, the writer will go to court, and everyone will know their real identity. It is a win-win situation. False sensation of security and curiosity satiated; all in one.”

Will’s blood freezes, the sensation runs down his spine like an electric shock produced by touching a bare wire with his bare feet touching water.

That exact thought was key to encourage his decision to keep everything undercover. He could keep writing and <u>he</u> would be sending more letters. There wasn’t any rush. After all, he had to start writing the third book for the grand finale to even happen–if they don’t consider cancelling his trilogy just because the <u>idiot</u> couldn’t keep <u>his</u> dick in <u>his</u> pants.

“You are wrong for seeing their murders like profit, but I guess I couldn’t have expected more sense and empathy from a woman who harasses the families of the victims to get info.” He drinks down the hole glass of wine without breathing. *(Freddy is, in fact, impressed with his capacity of transforming every drink into a tequila shot.)* “This job really suits you, Freddy. After all, *psychos* attract each other.”

(Never mind, forget her amazement and almost round of applauses).

The shape of her mouth transforms into a thin line that shows her apathy. She stands with her glass on her hand, making him wish she will leave so he can go to his date *(she can take the glass with her if she wants to, better for him)*. Instead, Freddy walks to the kitchen, her heels

hitting hard on the floor. Will doesn't follow her, but he imagines the delicate cat-like movements stopping in front of the kitchen sink to pour the wine and leave the glass without any tenderness. She comes back and sits closer to him on his special rotting bed/coach, the light of the orange lamp behind her illuminates her hair to look similar to a halo surrounding her head. And he is glad Alana convinced him of buying it.

It is fire spreading all the way down to her body; flashes of oranges and reds fly freely around her until the sound of meat getting fried with its own grease comes to live.

He has always loved winter–the past year not a lot–, it means having hot chocolate and fishing on ice, it means a break from *«work»* and playing in the snow with his dogs and Alana. He likes the white soils and gray skies and sudden storms hitting his windows, an entire day in front the chimney with hot coffee and books that can't keep too much of his attention because he is too concentrated watching the wood darkening and screaming in agony.

Everything that can die under the fire's strength is poetic.

A part of him thinks that maybe burning someone will feel as good as watching the logs being consumed on Christmas night. And the smell of meat and blood will be a great companions to the smell of smoke and coal. So, when he sees that image of Freddy burning before his eyes, he gathers all his inner peace to relax, look at his bottle of wine, and speak next.

"That is an expensive wine."

"Really? I could swear it tasted like shit." Her sly smile coils around him like a snake with cool skin and bright colors. Everything on it screaming danger. "This is the thing, Graham. Jack will call you there again. I know you will follow, so, remember one thing: it would be wise of you to use me, 'kay? Judging criminals is not a hobby for either of us, is a job… and I'm running out of material, so be wise, Graham. And treat me better or I'll ruin your life, again."

Their eyes meet for a few seconds before he turns to grab the bottle of wine and drink directly from it. "We make peace and then, what? You will leave me alone?"

"Oh, God, no! But I can restore at least a bit of your reputation. Help you get your place at Quantico back…" Will sees outside of the front window. The sky is starting to darken. He needs to go now before the rain begins. She walks to get her purse from the coach she was sitting on. "This story will be exciting. The Idol and the Acolyte, who is the real killer? I bet all those paranoic mothers are telling their kids *«Midnight Myths»* is diabolical as they burn your work in their little noses."

It doesn't have a point, Will wants to tell her, he has come to realization that fighting for his job is a senseless task. At some point, Will considered telling the truth to show he is reliable so he could get his job back. That didn't last long, though; he doesn't know what to expect from himself after taking <u>him</u> down and the risk of becoming exactly what *they* need Will to be in order to lock him up is definitely a pain in the ass.

“Paranoic mothers are nothing good, Freddy. Stop being happy about the wrong things.”

How can they both dare to be happy about the wrong things and yet he is always in the wrong?

Freddy stays in silence; she is considering it. “No. Paranoic mothers are the ones feeding me and paying the bills. All my love goes to them.”

Will nods, defeated, and he watches her walking to the door after she puts on her little beret. She then adds. “Think well about your next move, Graham. I can bring you to the light.”

The bang that follows her exit leaves him frozen in place, paying attention to outside sounds. The door opening and closing, the engine on her car starting, the movements she does to turn around and leave, the sound fading in the distance…

Silence is only interrupted by the whines and barks of his dogs playing outside. He takes the bottle of wine to drink the last bit, his reflection disfigures on the surface making his shapes and proportions transform until all he can see is an unknown creature trying to imitate him. Will recognizes in its face the soft change in his eyes that alerts him about his tipsiness. He smiles at the feeling; it is nice to be drunk once more. Is also fatal because that makes him more uninhibited about the control he has with his mind and actions *(and because now he needs to find a way to avoid police if he is driving there)*.

‘*It excites me to teach You what I know and to learn what You know.’*

There is no wonder why many people see him as a disturbed man when he is sitting on his living room considering going to a murderer’s warehouse. In some way it makes sense to him, the most intense feeling he has felt in a long time came from a monster who held a human heart on <u>his</u> hand, so sweetly and delighted by <u>his</u> own actions that it is hard for Will to ignore it. In some other way, Will excuses his behavior with the fact that he is simply suicidal.

These types of things had happen every now and then, moments where he finds himself so immerse into the killer’s mind that he can’t think of anything else no matter how gruesome, putrid, painful… he is always back for another round.

He has been fighting that feeling with Alana on his side, unconsciously preparing himself to combat a bigger monster that can throw all his training to the trash with a simple *«dear Will»*. But, what exactly makes <u>him</u> so strong to the point of making Will bend even after he promised not to return?

In the past he had no problem inventing pretexts to dodge the criminals and their crimes. Diseases, classes, marriage… <u>he</u> surely can’t be that special.

Is it because he doesn’t have a job, and the one that he has doesn’t really feel like a job to him? Is it because he doesn’t have a wife keeping him with the feet on the ground? Is it because he doesn’t have children aside from his dogs? Is it because he has been spending a lot of time hiding in his house without much human interaction?

Is that it?

His self-imposed reclusion?

Before this, he never really considered that being excluded like a hermit was doing him damage since the intrusive thoughts were like flashes of thinking easy to forget; his unwanted desires were ignored, resting, turned off. But is right to suppose that what he did by hiding was to stop feeding what resides inside him. He's been starving for *this*.

He is also afraid of the monster he created. Killing him seems proper.

Will lets a few minutes go by before he starts running upstairs to search for the keys. He left them on the chest along with the jar and the letter–in case the desk decided to betray him and Alana found it by mistake–the key of the chest is normally under the cushion of his chair, sometimes he changes it to other places to feel secure. With just a week of waiting he has found twenty four places to hide it just inside his house, if he goes to the barn then there will be other hundred places to keep it safe.

It has been a week since the first letters, and he has been waiting for this very moment when he can feel his heart rushing and the blood coloring his skin. Every object that he touches on his way to his studio feels heavy on his own hands but not impossible to grab. They are more like a warning. A «not trespassing» signal that he puts out of the way easily. They are also hot, if it is his own body, the alcohol or a sensorial hallucination doesn't really matter, but the sensation is there to burn his hand so he won't touch anything.

Going up is easy, opening the door to his studio is easier, opening the chest is even easier… watching the gun makes him stop. He forgot he put it in there too. It smiles at Will so seductively he needs to stop for a moment and rethink if what he is doing is the correct thing to do and not an impulsive conclusion he got to make just to satisfy the obsession he grew for him.

It's been a week since he tried to kill himself with that same gun because the picture of Chiyo left his mind in a hole of grief he never experimented before. And now it is being used to bring him to Earth for a minute to explain once more what made him chose *«being pen pals with a serial killer»*. Galatea, Amanda and André are watching him hold the gun in his hand. He bets they would like it better if he were to blow his own head or the head of the bastard who took their lives. However, he is not so certain of wanting more blood on his hand even if no one finds out.

Will retracts from taking the bunch of keys and the leaves the gun back in place. He needs to call Crawford and tell him to go with him; he doesn't have any fear of getting stains in his suit.

Alana's car parks outside just in time to add fear into his mind, he can hear her laughter and her loud rattle as she speaks on the phone. Will comes at ease, shoulders falling in surrender before the expectant eyes that watch him sitting in silence on the chair.

Different sounds coming from downstairs act like white noise in his overloaded mind, they are also telling him his wife's actions, the dogs bark happily to be with her and to listen at her

voice; he guesses her phone call has ended because she is now talking in a high pitch to his children. Meanwhile, the three victims await his verdict.

Will shakes his head softly as he begs for the inevitable to become something avoidable. Concentration flies away from his hands, and every breath he takes is a negotiation between his desires and his morals, all well taught by the severity of his father. He thought he had everything under control, he has spent the last week thinking he can do this and become *«friends»* with his acolyte in the name of justice. The fake confidence, the desire to feel the *rush* on his veins again, and the excitement to know there are other two cases blinded him with the idea of meeting him. And Will gets afraid after genuinely thinking deeper about what it represents to him and the comfortable life he doesn't want to lose.

The goal of his plan was set because *«he is a loner whose life doesn't matter if that means he can do something right for once in his life»*? He's been alone for as long as he remembers, so why is he trying to run behind him? He has a wife, he has kids, he has friends… he has *Beverly*.

Being alone in that house really takes the worst of him when it comes to make decisions. He laughs to the silly ideas he used to have about how living alone and isolated was the best and the best thing to do to avoid conflicts; well, he certainly isn't the wisest of men since he is chasing conflicts because «he-is-a-lo-ne». Gosh, he needs to do something with his life before he loses it completely.

He tries hard not to succumb into the call that Chiyo chants into his direction, pleading for Alana to go to him and stop him, kiss him, love him just a little so he can find meaning in life. To remind him that he is worthy of something opposite to the fear he can deposit in others. Good men don't need barriers, they don't need «not trespassing signals», they don't need contention to stop them from doing something regretful; and they certainly don't need hallucinations to let them know there is something wrong in all the excitement he secretly feels when he is kissing danger.

But he is not a good man, is he? Not with all his reports at the FBI telling how he shot five people. All by accident or out of necessity according to the rules, sure, but having rushes of excitement isn't in the same rules. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean that he can't change–

"Honey, I'm back." The door opens and he sees her coming in.

Alana means salvation, which is why he let her talk on his behalf behind his back when he was a special agent. She was concern about him and his health. She was trying to help like she is doing now without her knowledge.

As his wife stands before him, he gazes upon her as if she is a prophet bringing words of peace and prosperity for the world. Will thought about all the things he could lose if he chose to run behind him, the house, the freedom, the river, the dogs, the friend, the «love». He is not ready to give up on them due to the revenge–addiction–he so hungrily wants to get.

She looks beautiful tonight; her long and black lashes highlight the cold blue on her irises, and the soft lips are a call to be kissed and bite. She shines with the hope that he will take her hand so he won't have to go *there to him*.

To be on her presence is an aching stab to his soul that leaves him defenseless. Soon all glimpse of unpleasant emotions disappears from his chest with just one look in her soul.

Alana comes closer to him, smelling like Ambery Vanilla and beer. They smile to each other after their kiss–ghostly, plastic, fake–his smile is forced and if she notices he is careless about it, all he thinks about is that Alana is there and maybe–his mind wants to believe it–she is there because she could sense his distress.

“I came for some papers. A friend is helping me to build a presentation for tomorrow and another for the congress next weekend.” He nods unconsciously. “I really need to finish this, so I’ll be back before the sunrise to sleep a little, maybe before that, it is… 6:30, so maybe I come home at 1 am. Okay?” Will nods again. She smiles and kisses him again before leaving the room.

In her trip around the house, he follows her like the other dogs would do. She talks about her day, her job, her conferences and her friends. He cooks her dinner and watches her eat while she keeps bragging about her new model student and a gift someone gave her for her years of teaching. Even when he can’t look at her, he knows that she never turns to look at him, it would be the same if Will weren’t there.

Alana could have been having the same conversation with the dogs.

He decides to concentrate in another thing to forget the feeling that is suddenly forming on his stomach. Ears off and eyes absorbed by the movements of her hands and the shapes that her lips create every time a new word comes out; it is mesmerizing to see the delicacy with which her pointy nails put an end to her fingers, or the slight glimpses of white he sees every time her teeth are shown in a grin.

What will be of him after she leaves?

“Are you okay?” She asks softly when they are finally at the front door.

The abrupt sound feels abnormally loud. Will sighs perplexed of how time flew around them when he decided to rejected her, from thinking she was an angel to refuse to spent minutes on heaven. That wasn’t what he wanted to happen, how could he be so stupid to reject her and not take advantage of the peace she brought!

‘Alana means salvation.’

Then why did his mind paused her existence? She was talking about her day, wasn’t that enough to keep his feet on the ground? To remind him about what *«normal»* looks like?

He can’t show his growing deception, he won’t have a way to explain why he needs her so much tonight.

Instead, he takes a few seconds to respond. A raspy voice comes out of his mouth, tongue and throat very dry to formulate words audible enough for her to listen. “Do you think there is something wrong with me?”

Preoccupation is visible on her frown, but it is suddenly replaced with understanding. He has seen her make the same face before, when she talks with victims and their families, when she interviews criminals, accomplices or suspects. Is not the kind of grin he expects to see from his lover.

“Yes, but in the same way that there is something wrong with all of us. We all have desires and needs that will oppose against our morals, but despite that, having something wrong with us doesn’t make us necessarily evil.” She says. Her smile is sweet like the smile of a doctor explaining to a kid how the medicine works. “That is what makes us good for each other. Besides, it is not your flaws you have to look at, there are many wonderful things in you, Will.”

‘Then why you always leave me?’ He wants to say, either way, Alana seems to read his mind and narrows her eyes in an astute stare.

“Do you think *there is* something wrong with you?”

Will shakes his head. “Georgia says I lack creativity since I’m not in the FBI anymore. I thought it was because of depression, she thinks is because of my *«murderous tendencies»* disappearing.”

His wife chuckles.

“Then, maybe you can start writing other genres. The world is full of possibilities.” Alana takes her bag and her umbrella, and Will lends her the keys of her car. “Healing isn’t easy, Will. You’ll find something, I know.”

You’ve never been hurt; you are not sick… what are you healing from? Asks Chiyo behind him.

He had already found something. Something that is repulsive and horrifying for anyone in their right mind. Over all to the three victims standing behind Alana to provoke him shame.

This is the right moment to tell her and end with everything. They say. She’ll know what to do. She’ll love it if you are honest, she won’t fear you if you do what is right. They say. Every bite of love and interest she gives you is enough to do what she says, so do what is right, win her love back.

‘She’s playing with ya; can’t love someone sick.’ Thanks, Beau for appearing when one less needs you.

The three put sad expressions in their faces as they hide behind Alana as if she plays the role of guardian or representative, but one thing is for certain and that is that none of that will help now that Chiyo is standing by his side again. Her eyes uncaring of the people around her and rather occupied staring at the twirling clouds coming their way in great velocity. Will looks at the same sky and connects with her by *accident*.

She is the desire, the need, the pleasure and the anger that impulses him to act since day one, when he learned about his gift. The reason why his been waiting for <u>his</u> letters to come. She

is power and compulsion coexisting on the same metallic box someone told him not to open.

On the contrary, *they* are his humanity and his fear of the death–guilty as him of their own sins, not so good examples when it comes to rectify what is humane–they are the reason why he should look for help. Because doing this for *them* means doing this for others, avoiding the murders from happening and bringing peace as soon as possible so others don't live with worry in their minds is what they trained him to do. The law is there for a reason even if the system doesn't work correctly all the time.

He'll have the gratification of doing what is good, yet he'll live with a bitter flavor on his mouth for not doing what he wants. For him nothing will be enough.

But how could anything be enough when the people around him have been so afraid of him for a long time thanks to his disorders—feel a lot or don't feel at all. None of them tried to dissimulate their revulsion as the they taught him to behave so he wouldn't hurt people because *«that would feel wrong»*. He had no right to satisfied or show his latent desires even when joking without having others reacting strangely about it.

Hypocrites, all of them. Chiyo says. If they were alive they would have felt the same repulsion even when they are no less sinners than you.

'But you wouldn't.'

As a matter of fact, how is he to blame just because he was born a little damaged? Everyone around him is full of shit but no one does anything to resolve it or ask for forgiveness, meanwhile, it is expected from him to kneel and commit self-flagellation like a martyr before the ideas can even start to transform in his head.

Hypocrites, all of them. Repeats Chiyo.

Will sees Alana leaving the property and he thinks about the time they started dating. He loved her from the beginning, way before she started developing feelings for him.

From his point of view, there was no one similar to Alana in the world, not someone who could treat him with so much respect and gentleness like her. He admired her beauty and her intelligence by reading everything she published and even going as far to sit in her conferences despite of having a thousand of therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists chasing him to have the opportunity to see what is inside his head.

They never spent a lot of time alone in the same room, he wasn't sure why or if he was just imagining things, but he was fine knowing that at least she cared enough about him to be his friend. Until she finally found the courage to stand by his side after Crawford told him to be in the field again as a special agent. She disagreed to that, of course, she knew him since the moment he started teaching at Quantico, she read his papers and reports almost like a show of gratitude towards him for reading hers.

Alana was a good friend and a good defender even when he felt like he didn't need one. The days he spent working with Crawford were a nightmare only tamed by Alana's bright smile and her great brain.

She treated him so tenderly and lovingly. When he finally connected the dots on why she didn't like to be alone with him, it made him comprehend that she already knew who he was below the mask he always wore so he could fit into society's norms. For a long time he believed that he had that part of him well hidden, that he was a functional grown-up man with dark tendencies that he could use to solve mysteries and catch killers. Alana only made clear that his instability was more evident than he believed it was.

But she accepted him.

That day in his house after he received a shot she went to visit him. She brought him food and medicine; she even took the time to clean and disinfect his wound. Her hands in his skin felt warm in a way he didn't feel them before, and the soft sensation on her respiration hitting against his shoulder blade made him weak. He kissed her out of impulse, and she returned the same affection so gentle he started considering himself fragile under her touch– something that would remain even years after the formalization of their relationship.

After living a life pretending he was strong, she disarmed him with just the warmth of her body over his and the sound of her respiration on his ear.

Dating her was a surprise for him and those around him. A broken man was capable of loving and have a life like any other.

He married her in front of his dad, and then the man–as if it seeing Will married sicked him– started to die months after which left Will without the opportunity of bragging about how much he was worth of being loved by someone.

The good thing about having a dead mother was that she didn't listen how Will promised under an altar–towered by a God that abandoned him long ago–how he would love the woman holding his hand. Will though of his mother like a lucky woman for dying without hearing that, and his father was a lucky bastard for winning the bet he made with the Universe only a few years later. His son was unlovable, and the years after his burying were showing it.

"I, Alana Bloom, take thee, Will graham,

to be my wedded husband,

to have and hold from this day forward,

for better, for worse,

for richer, for poorer,

in sickness and in health,

to love and cherish,

till death do us apart–"

In his deathbed, Will knelt by Beau's side holding his hand and sharing no tears. There was only contempt for the man who now asked for forgiveness for the way he treat him in his growing days just so he could die peacefully and go to Heaven clean. Will couldn't find sorrow for his father, his mother or for himself. It was hard to even be there feeling the sad stares of the nurses who didn't know about their abusive past. He didn't care if his father was dead, is not like he loved him at all. He just wanted to revive what he felt when he saw his mother.

Or that is what he thought.

No matter how much anger he felt for the man and how much he wanted to be the one putting his hands in his neck to cut the air flow, Will tried to kill himself because he missed him. His gift–that fucking curse of his–showed him the repent on his old man's eyes… too late for any of them to return to the days when they were happy.

And Alana saved him… and now she was leaving him.

Even so he can't find genuine anger against her.

The similarity of him and a dog is that he could have been left tied with chain under the rain for years and he would still have wave his tail with happiness at the mere sight of her. He wonders if she can see how much he loves her despite her fear and the emptiness she makes him feel.

You are not alone in this world, yet you are alone in this life. Chiyo says. Do you want to be saved just to keep living this loneliness you feel? Or do you want to go on a trip with us?

The gun and the keys go into the pocket of his sweater. If he is going to die he at least expects to die under the embrace of a creature that is like drug running through his blood as he brings it down with him. There will be three people and six dogs crying over his grave, that should be enough to accept his faith. He won't be alone during and after his dead, not if Chiyo and her friend come with him to Hell.

Will takes two fingers of whiskey to feel dizzier and braver, blaming his future actions on the alcohol. The door opens thanks to his trembling hands, the cold weather product of the rain welcomes him into the obscurity of the world.

"Everyone dies in times like these." He says out loud. His dogs bark for attention but he can't turn to see them. He doesn't want them to stop him. "I'll be back in an hour… I think."

The door handle on his car opens so smoothly Will thinks it is excited to go on the trip to Somerville. He doesn't start the motor when he enters, instead he forces himself to remember if life was once nice to him, not to stop himself but to be sure there will be a nice movie to comfort him as he waits for the other side.

Going to school, fighting with his classmates and studying were pleasant when his father wasn't around to bother him. If he was and if he wasn't indulging into his habits, fixing boat motors with him was nice too. With the hard sun coloring their skin and their sweat wetting

their clothes whilst his father told him how to handle the lamp correctly or what was the best way to change the oil.

Very well, that should be enough.

He starts the motor to produce a deep roar when the electricity starts running through its engine. As he drives away he sees his house from the review mirror. In the darkness and with its lights still on, it looks like a boat in the middle of nowhere, floating on the quiet stream while its anchor keeps it in place for the moment Will is ready to return and settle sail to a new place.

When the hallucination of the three victims sitting in the back seat replaces the image of his boat so he is compelled to focus on the road, mind entering a trance that lures him to the warehouse. This is the little riddle somebody made for him, and he wants to hear the answer of it. If they catch them, he thinks, he will say that he was playing the game to gather information and for that he needed to win the *«man's»* trust by not telling the police.

He will say to the press that he is sorry for not telling the police sooner about his discovery, but he had to do what he had to do. He will avoid the chair no matter what, and the victims will have the justice that they deserve. One way or another, he'll find the way to keep his personality intact when he plays to be him. *He knows who he is,* and whether he likes it or not, he'll do anything to keep it that way.

If they catch them, he will applaud him proudly. He will win the game and he will ask him for another round. Snake-like eyes registering his life until Will won't have other option but to say yes as he is doing right now. He'll wait for that moment too, and he'll prepare for the next riddle until they both can fall into desperation and, consequentially, their dead.

"And here we are. Four psychopaths in the same room." Well, Freddy was right. There was a reason why he chose to join a career and an institution that is always rounded by death even when he always declared how much he feared it. It actually excites him to run behind those creatures, to become them and reject his true self by dividing himself from *them*. Some sort of superiority complex in it, now that he thinks about it.

Chiyo sighs proudly and he hits his door with the side of his fist.

The night is nice despite the water, the sound of the rain and the traffic helping to keep him focused in something that isn't the pleads of his fear trying to stop him. He can't listen to it right now, he is focused on killing his obsession from the roots, and for that all senses must become him. Will is a different entity inside his own body, watching himself driving in the dark to the void he entered a week ago. The only time he stops is to pay the toll, *(it will be a problem if someone decides to investigate him. Too many cameras pointing at him and his whereabouts, but there will be time to worry about that. Now he has to use the opportunity of having his head empty)*.

Arriving to Somerville happens in a blink that finally gets him his body back. The wet warehouse has another image under the storm; it is imponent, solid, old and majestic under the lights of his car and the strength with which the air agitates the trees.

He goes out with the little lamp on hand–now properly charged–and the cold water covers him in this night of baptism when he accepts a religion ruled by his creation and the demons he created; as father of everything, he decides when to end the game, as his master, Will chooses that his own intrigue is the perfect weapon against *him*.

His gaze travels down to the ground creating puddles made of dirt and grass and water. Then up to the sky to let his face be washed by the squall. He perceives that all nights have been this nice and is only now when he is walking to the hanging rope that he can appreciate that.

He has imagined his death being violent. Hideous. Not peaceful with the smell of petrichor and pines existing to bring comfort into his existence. He thanks it, though, because those are the things Will like as Will, they'll protect him if he knows how to use them.

Will walks to the warehouse with fake confidence that makes him look like a strong man entering the doors of Hell. It is locked, and his heart skips a beat. *He* was there, and now he is also there. The tension on his body grows with every single second he thinks more and more about his life and his future; his wife, his dogs, his house; he is not only playing catch with a stranger, but also with a killer whose obsession could grow so much he could hurt the people Will loves just out of rage and jealousy. Still, if he doesn't play, nothing promises him that he won't hurt them out of spite; he'll find a way to monopolize him until alienation.

The man looks at the light that comes from his car, ready to run inside again and return to his little boat. He can go to Crawford's house, wake him up and make a large speech about the letters, take his wife with him and escape to some place where death and police would never find them. His father taught him how to fix boat motors and how to fish and hunt. He could give Alana a decent life out of the public eye… right?

Quantico isn't that far from there, he can always count these murders like another case into the pile, work on it and close it instead of taking his keys out and opening the door.

Everything is like he remembers except for the missing flowers on the greenhouse and two document bags made of green, synthetic leather standing by the coffer's side. A shiver runs through his body when he puts a foot inside the room, softly he slides all the way to the table where the box stays patiently for him. Its pink color resembles the color of fresh flesh cut out of an animal attracting flies to it, fetching him into burrow his fingers in its cuts. It tells him. *'Take, eat, this is my body. Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins.'*

The woman on the bathtub looks at him with a lost expression that radiates glimpses of content when her conscious works properly. Notwithstanding, Will can feel her joy, her gratitude and her love. Love. *What could be described as obsession, Will feels it as love. Genuine love, so tender and so good he wonders when the last time was that he felt something like that.*

Little by little the motion begins to fade and as he sees into his student's eyes until the last flash of love is delivered to him..

Will stands to look at himself in the mirror, heart in hand and blood covering him.

It's wonderful. And it is his.

It aches to be touched, it is full of a wanton need to be lift and open. It desires attention and caresses that it has long forgotten. Memories that smell like rotten meat, must, rotten cabbage and rotten eggs are now part of a drug it uses to intoxicate itself just for the sole purpose to feel something. It can no longer see the victims that were killed for it, its empty inside has no place for guilt, and it just wishes to receive the asphyxiating love someone can give it.

The little box has waited for an entire week for him to open him, to feel his tact on its surface… considering the months he lived in its mind is sure to say that it has been waiting all its life to be fill with filth and waste. The little box trembles with angst when it imagines his touch warming its borders till his soft touch is replace by the coldness of loneliness and it is left aching for more.

When he is about to take the little lock between his fingers, Will's phone ring and he gasps loudly for air. The name of his wife is the one projecting in the screen. He answers before the sound can keep going any longer.

"Alana? Is there something wrong?" Will clears his throat to reduce its dryness.

[I– I don't know, you tell me. I came home for something, and I found out you were gone] The sound of his dogs barking and crying is noticeable behind her voice. *[You didn't tell me you were going out]*

"I went out to buy some books, I– hmm… Freddy came to *«visit»* and now we are out of wine so I'm buying a new bottle," His hands tap over the laid of the coffer, even he is impressed with the naturality of his lies. "I'll be back at home in an hour, don't worry. Go to your friend's house and take your time, I'll be fine."

[Is just that you didn't look fine before I left. I got scared for a minute.] The front door closes, and he hears her steps crushing some rocks and leaves under her shoes. The rain is still going for both of them. *[The rain is worsening so take care when you come back, okay?]*

"Yeah, you too." The motor of her car starts. "Hey, Alana?"

[Yes, dear?]

"Do you want me to buy you something? I can even buy something to thank your friend for helping you."

Alana thinks it through, her own fingers now tapping on the wheel. *[Actually I think that'll be great. There is a place I was thinking of visiting next week with you, I'll send you the address. Buy two boxes of truffles, one for us and one for my friend. His daughter is home and they both love sweets, so it'll be great as a welcome-home gift]*

"I can buy three, if you want."

[Really?] Will smiles when he hears her smile through the phone. *[That'll be sweet of you. And about going out next week, now that I ruined the surprise… we can go for something*

Italian, maybe?]

“Any important occasion?” Their wedding anniversary was in April and there aren’t any birthdays coming soon. And if they were to celebrate something he would remember.

[No, I just think that… we haven’t been together in a while… alone. So, I’m trying to flirt?] Will chuckles; her laugh joins him a bit later. *[I know it sounds dumb, but I really want this, and I want you to relax]*

“It isn’t dumb. I would like it, actually. I just need to see if I can take a day off from work.”

[Ha, ha. Yeah, I always forget how busy you are. Buy what I told you and go home right after that, okay?]

“Yes, boss.” She laughs. “And Alana?”

[Yes?]

“I love you.”

[Me too.]

He is left in the darkness again and now he feels pathetic for thinking Alana doesn’t love him anymore when all this time she has done everything to help him; she is suffocating with all her work and Will is to immerse in his pitiful self to even see she loves him no matter what; he whines and whines and whines but he doesn’t have the balls to accept her love.

Too much time alone with his thoughts is definitely bad for him, and three years now without nothing to do apart from writing books while hiding from any human interaction are stunting him. He’ll buy her something for their date, new earnings will be fine.

The smile on his face disappears when the sound of a branch falling outside wakes him up. His gaze immediately falls to the Pandora box. It smiles at him, waiting for its inside to be empty again and Will sighs with remorse. What is he doing here?

Playing a little game. Chiyo says. Playing the hero.

When he opens it, the first thing he takes out is a small box gift-wrapped with light blue paper and a golden ribbon, under this is the letter, sealed with blue wax. Will shakes the little box softly to hear little items jumping inside it. The envelope and the gift both go into one of the bags that he puts on his shoulder. For an instant he thinks about taking a peek inside the greenhouse, maybe feeling more adventurous an open the locked door on the back…

No, it’s too much for today, he needs to leave.

He won’t be seeing anything until he gets home–after buying what he needs to buy–after locking the main door, he runs under the rain to his car, protecting in any way possible the bags from getting wet.

The document bags find their place on the back seats. He takes out his sweater, unable to stand the feeling of having wet clothes touching his skin and grateful that he kept the engine on so he could be warm. Alana's message illuminates the car's darkness but he doesn't pick it up, his mind is focused on the ghost sensation that the bags left on his shoulder, the rain and the once again, the bags.

Will looks at the warehouse one last time.

He came, not only that, but he also isn't mad. The bags and gifts confirm it, and he is free to go home with important evidence on his hands, *alive*. *He trusts Will.* Their game is still going which only leads to the first question of his new letter. How does he know Will won't say anything to the police? He could have taken photos of the place, come with someone to investigate, tell Crawford about his plan, *give* the drawings and photos and the gift as evidence *right under his nose.* How is he so sure Will won't stab him on the back? And the second question is: *when* did he come to the warehouse?

If Will didn't wait for an entire week they might have crossed paths, what's more, they could have even cross paths as Will drove to the warehouse. Did he know about Will's unsaid rule? Are there any cameras or movement alarms that can tell him when Will arrives and leaves? *Is he watching him?*

The high lights of the car shine through the obscurity of the night but they are incapable of showing him a wider panorama. In the shadows of the forest must be someone waiting for him, watching him from the afar with a gun in hand in case Will decided to cheat. He sighs before putting the shifting on reverse.

Next time he is there he will have to look out for cameras or any other gadgets with alarms. He doesn't want to but going into the little door might seem as something he will need to do as well so he can be sure he isn't actually living there. It would be weird, he thinks, because it wouldn't make sense according to his profile and Chiyo's profile. Both of them need recognition of the masses, being confined is something only people like Will do actively. There is a probability he might resort to living behind the curtain away from the scenario, but only when necessary. *This moment* to Will doesn't seem necessary at all.

There might be someone else down there too. Someone who can tell him about Will's whereabouts and actions every time he puts a foot on the warehouse. He shivers due to the cold of his body and the spooky sensation that stretches down his body when thinking of that. If it is true or not, one day he will open that door, the sooner the better if he wants to end the play before it can come close to its plot twist.

'Next time.' He thinks. *'Soon.'* Will sighs.

He sets the direction on course and drives silently to the bakery shop, passing in front of Quantico to change routs to avoid pattern repetition on his trip; he tries to fake that his body doesn't shiver with emotion knowing that there are bags full of evidence on his backseat, and that the rush of joy that comes to him is just another rush of cold delivering to his body.

Chiyo is in the seat by his side, she smiles for him.

Chapter End Notes

Was it long? I think it was, but I'm not really sure. I finally gave Tsumabe her real name! Well, is not as it is a big reveal but I'm happy of showing her as she is.
Will is a mess of contradictions, always wanting to run from danger but feeling inevitable attracted to it.
I'm also a few chapters close of introducing Hannibal to Will, if he is going to "win" Will's heart then he might as well do it from both sides (good, bad; friend, stalker; God, Devil). Playing with his mid is Hannibal's definition of love.

See you soon.

Lies and Love Go Hand by Hand

Chapter Summary

Will is loved. Will is loved. Will is loved...
What does love even feels like?

Chapter Notes

I already have like... three chapters ready to go. But is so fucking hard to be your own beta reader! I still like to re read the things I do.
Will is close to meet Hannibal.

Also, I'm uploading from my phone and it is hard to make every look like I want it while I also fight for my life against mosquitoes. I'll edit it later when I arrive from my trip (hopefully, victorious after the mosquito battle)

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dear Will

It amazes me to know how harsh You can be when lying to Yourself. Was your last message a Freudian slip or a change of heart made at the last second? Either way, I was more than happy when I got that little message of Yours–improper as it is, but I guess I can't say much since it seems like an adequate reaction for this kind of interactions.

I don't know when You'll be reading this letter, but I do hope You read it at least after the third. That way my work won't be interrupted once I begin to organize the next round. Let's not make our little game something short to enjoy, long pleasantries are better for the heart and the mind, they are like working in a painting for months until one is finally able to see the end. It will not always leave us satisfied, yet the reward will have been worth of every stain or wrong color chosen.

Now, now, going back to Your letter, You need proper answers to Your questions.

I'm not insane, and You are right, neither are You. We could never be understood even by psychological standards or psychiatric measurements. I never expected You to love me, nor to jump in my hands immediately–it did sound lovely, I have to admit that–, all I wanted to know was what my poems meant to You. Get angry at me, shout and tell me that You'll never

understand me, it is fine, because all I that You can give me, I want it. I love to love You, Will, that is the only thing important for me. You don't have to reciprocate my feelings, just know that my admiration for You–pathological as it is (I recognize it)–was made to have an impact in Your life.

I can't take You out of mine, so please, don't take me out of Yours.

I could never «go and bother another writer, another FBI agent», I have known others like You. Same gift and similar faces, same personalities, but neither of them can be compared to the man that has me risking everything for Him. There is something about You that is terrible attracting to my eyes, and I wouldn't want to look for a replica of the real statue. I'll adventure to say that to compare me to other killers you have catch is a terrible mistake, after all, how many of them have loved You like this?

Two sinners can be good for each other, the only way to open Hell in Earth is with the union of all the poor devils, and still, I would never have the heart to compare You to the smell of Hell. Revelations 5:6, remember? Good things can also feel hate, good men can also sin, this is what makes them humans. So, I understand You wanting to feel righteous by killing me and delivering justice to those poor souls. Hypocrite, but understandable.

You judge me for my big ego and my pathological mindset, yet You can't even recognize the narcissistic pattern in Yourself–or somehow You have convinced Yourself that such thing can be controlled by Your own will. You could condone murder if it is to do the «right thing»? What a coincidence, my dear!

I kill for perfection, You kill for justice, and at the end, we both kill because one of the sheep left the herd wrongfully named as «the right thing», morals are often attract to aesthetics. Never forget it.

Some of Your killers killed for love; must of Your murderers murdered for power and control; and then, on the corner far from the table of the grownups, are those who excuse murder with justice and who might never leave the kids' table. Killing to feel righteous doesn't make You any different from the being that converted people in salt statues, drowned an entire town, killed children, and who punished his creation by making them eat their kin. Congratulations for–unconsciously–admitting that You are God, precious lamb.

With that explained, I can finally put You with the other «typical minds» and «non special people» who often tend to be «killers made by the book»; a party I proudly belong to. (With that, I also put You back at the same level that me, one step closer to the big table).

Like any other food chain, animals recognize the one who is above them, and in those cases when death wanders the roads and streets, is better for all of them to hide. Sometimes I like to have a little fun and walk through the darkness alone; being just a common citizen walking at nights through streets full of other dangers are a risk to whomever dares to do it and I confess it makes me feel a kind of rush that makes the hunting more exciting. I have never found a problem while indulging in my fun. I am not common, dear.

I am not another of the guests in a table that belongs to me, under a roof that has my scent impregnated in every corner and every room, and over the top of a chain I can bend however

I want.

My invitation for You, Will, does not come with the intention of getting You dressed as me–as much as I liked fantasizing about You in my shoes–there wouldn't be any fun on having another me sitting in the table when I can have YOU as You are. So, whether You'd like to kill someone or not, it is up to You; just stop lying to Yourself. And to finalize with Your letter:

I know I am not good for You, in fact, that is exactly what we need if we want to help You change. Destruction isn't bad as many think; from chaos and corruption come order and pureness, life can't exist without the contrariety caused by the actions and reactions of our behavioral patterns. I was specific with this on my first letter, my dear boy.

My plans on destroying You came since I knew about You. We would have played silly little games with Your mental state and led You to the border of despair, I would have killed You right in Your lowest and diaphanized Your heart for everyone to see. You represented a menace for me.

Imagine how oddly I felt when I knew about the existence of a man with an extraordinary rate on solved cases. Then Your dismal came, and the «accidents» happened, making me learn that the only reason why you were so good at catching people like me, was because YOU are like me. I find You intriguing, so mesmerizing I decided to invite You instead of killing You. I owe You my love, Will.

Now. It is time to focus on something more important.

This two bags contain Chiyo's drawings and pictures, You might even recognize some of them whilst others can be completely unknown by the public eye. You'll find a diversity of people, always excluding kids on our demographics, she changed a lot from victim to victim since the only thing that mattered to her was her rituals. Kill, recreate, reuse, thank.

Leather; knifes made with carved bones; food for the animals on shelters, for the people on the street, and for many other organizations; handmade soaps; adhesives; arrowheads; hair jewelry… there is a large list of the many uses one can give to every part of the body. I am ignorant of her feeding habits since there weren't many times when we shared the table, but I do know she gave them a good use. Reborn can also come in the way our bodies are used after our deaths, and although she understood that many desired flowers and mushrooms and insects finding nourishment from their meat, Chiyo gave life with their dead. She killed and processed them to not let their souls rest in peace, but to give them a better utility. The same bags You have there were extracted from two victims, later treated and painted to become something better.

Only those who could be part again of the earth and its components–be one with the animals, fungi and plants–were those who she believed to be deserving of having their bodies returned to mother nature. Those pure by heart and soul who didn't deserve to be use as ornaments and items. Chiyo loved animals, however, she didn't like humans. They were too detestable for her. One day You'll be prepared to hear one of our last conversations before I lobotomized her; and You'll hear how much of her philosophy–radical as it is–can sound coherent at times.

I also sent You one of the little gifts I conserved from her, it was handmade in its entirety. Use it or hide it as You please, conserve this other part of her like a gift since she is my sacrifice for You to find entertainment and nourishment until the day of Your becoming arrives.

In her portfolio You will find sketches of flowers, corpses, places, and a house. Feel free to visit and use it when You are ready to; I do have to warn You that going before our story begins will be too soon, and going after our story will be too late. Everything should come in the right time so it can be enjoyed and appreciated in the way it was intended to. Don't bother to look for me there, I wouldn't go there unless the time is the right one; on the other hand, I have a special place in my mind palace made just for her, and that is the place where I can find her if someday I miss her. I enjoy living there sometimes, and its existence assures me that if something happens to me, I will still have the chance to exist in a familiar place full of wonders that will keep me entertained.

The same instructions of the gift go for the sketches and photos: keep them, return them, but don't burn them. Believe me, dear, when I say that You will regret trying to vanish her from You memory.

In other news, there are three corpses now (that is what I hope for). If You find this letter before the fourth, please, grant me the pleasure of having You there to see her. She is an incredibly special gift full of effort and my appreciation. I would like to say that she is a surprise, but I'm afraid You already know what I'm talking about. I have to thank You for that: writing and not destroying my flowers when You had the liberty of doing so. So, please, watch her.

Also, we are close to starting the second book, Will, and with it I'm taking the time to plan and organize all details for the next paintings. Would You wait another *winter for the snow to melt and the flowers to grow just to see our art coming to live once more?*

I had a long streak living on automatic. Many of my friends and acquaintances even wondered if there was any possibility that I was beginning to be depressed due to the little to no appearance that I had in events I used to enjoy. And to be quite frank, it truly seemed like no fine art was able to caught my attention for a long time, at least not in the way they used to do it. It had been a gradual descent driven by an unknown loneliness that came to me one day.

You brought back to me all inspiration and will to continue experimenting with new paints, materials, styles, textures. Hunting and killing never felt so fun before I met You, and with every passing day as I stalked my preys, I couldn't avoid thinking if hunting feels the same for You. Pulling the trigger, borrowing the knife in their bellies, butchering the next meal. It kind of ritualistic, if You ask me. Oh, how close we are to my dear Chiyo.

It puts in retrospective how many things in our lives had turned into rituals made to satisfy different gods. Many claim to be atheist and at the end of the day they end up worshipping their own variation of the holy creator.

I won't like to make this longer, so this is the moment to bid You adieu, but not before reminding You how important it will be for You to see her. I swear You won't regret it, Will.

I’m eager to know Your opinions.

Always Yours,

The mud on the ground has his boots submerging every time he steps somewhere. He supposedly chose to go out this day to avoid that since it hasn’t been raining in three days, but it’s clear there won’t be mercy for him. Though, he is glad the climate has brought many squalls with it unlike the past year with its petty two storms, the droughts don’t feel mortal as they normally do but the bad side is that this has also allowed the increment of mosquitoes on the rivers and other puddles created along the forest ground; having to use long sleeves to protect his arms is a solution he is finding rather perfect and annoying at the time. It is still preferable to get a heatstroke before putting in the hideous mosquito repellent that never seems to work for him.

The air is infused with a sweet aroma coming from the wildflowers, the wet soils, the river and the different species of trees surrounding his property. There aren’t many birds singing since the dogs have done their best driving them away when they run behind a hare or a squirrel; it is the silence of the soft breeze hitting the branches that accompanies their journey to the heart of the forest.

Sometimes he also hears the buzz and hums from the insects doing their job through the day before the night comes. With more light finding its way between the pine needles, is easier to watch out for any mushrooms or moss growing on the logs of the fallen trees that he sometimes stops to admire and study. When he feels like resting, he throws a branch across the forest for his dogs to fetch while he sits on some cut log to see the bravest birds coming and going from the highest branches to another looking for food on the floors or the holes in the trees.

In the past, such scenery would've been worth quiet walks through the woods holding Alana's hand whilst they watched the dogs running and chasing little animals until Will had to whistle to stop them from hurting other animals. Those were days of their first times together as a couple that soon turned into aleatory dates with specific rules to follow.

One of them–and really, the only one–is to never hunt with Alana. She doesn’t like the blood nor the squeaks of pain that the dogs produce in their prey when their snouts close around them. Neither does she like the smell of gun powder and the view of the last whines of agony that the animals do when the red rivers of thick liquid flow outside of their fresh wounds. Fishing is okay for her, though, she is happy to join him in the river to watch every now and then; the less cute she finds the animal, the less worry she is of killing it.

When she joined him to hunt for the first time, she retracted immediately after the second rabbit. Alana told him that he had a strange look in his face when the rifle touched his shoulder, eyes narrowed and disfigured to a dark expression that made her quiver with awe. He didn’t know what she meant until Jimmy told him the same thing when he shot the murderer they’d been following for weeks–his first accident.

‘You look like the woman from the «Lost Boys» case, remember? When she was trying to kill her «son»?’

Will remembers rolling his eyes to make him mad, Brian laughed and they continued with the investigation. But he does know well that look, empty of guilt and full of determination.

He started hunting alone right after that, and he tried not to make use of his gun to avoid having another criminal dead. Then the cop ended up in the hospital, and he accepted his faith.

When he hunts, he always makes sure to have a small number of preys on his possession, the maximum number he allows himself to carry home is from four or six. If he takes more is because of his dogs and their own instincts rushing them to bite anything that could appear in front of them.

He is often in charge of gutting and flaying the animals to prepare them for his dogs and for his own dinner. When he is in the mood, Beverly joins them to eat after work if she is available, if not, he will froze the meal and take it to her when she is back from wherever the cases take her to. Right now, Will has two hares ready to go into the kitchen, meanwhile the dogs have only chased mice and rats that Will had to bury somewhere to avoid having his dogs playing with their little bodies.

‘Only those who could be part again of the earth and its components–be one with the animals, fungi and plants–were those who she believed to be deserving of having their bodies returned to mother nature.’

As he sits on a rock as he thinks about the drawings. All types of flowers, people, animals, items and ornaments were perfectly detailed in paper as promised, it was evident that she preferred nature over people since the only time she drew human anatomy was for exercises or to depict her designs. Chiyo was impressive in every line she drew over the pages and pages inside her first bag, his favorites for the moment are the ones about the animals in the shelters she helped, followed by the bizarre looks in the few human faces that appeared every now and then.

There is something about their lost sighs and their forced postures, about her drawings of people, that seem inhuman. Will compared her drawings with other famous paintings to try and decipher what made them different from each other.

All humans portrayed on the papers were fake, a representation of how the artist felt that humans look like, however most of their paintings feel alive and real instead of being simple objects; there was light in their muses’ eyes.

To him, Goya’s black paintings felt more humane than Chiyo’s perfect drawings.

In them Will recognized what he meant by «they were too detestable». Not recognizing humanity meant not recognizing value, consequently, not recognizing their history and lives. Even her fashion designs had more authenticity than the pictures of her victims.

The best example is the drawing of a young man with long brown hair who, laying over his left side in a rug, looked at the spectator with a cold stare. His hairless body was exposed completely, his right arm rested gracefully on his waist and the left one held his head up. There is an evident perfection on the traces she did, the technic and composition followed every rule to make it worth of a gallery despite the simplicity of its concept. What doesn't sits right is the clear lack of life in the model's eyes; he is a mannequin printed in paper by Chiyo.

This same drawing is preceded by a photo of the poor young man posing over the same rug with his body leaning on a wall and a box keeping his head and hand in place so they wouldn't fall. His nakedness shows a big hole perforating under his third rib on the left side that she didn't bother to draw. Judging by the size and the detachment of flesh around of the wound, Will could see that the distance used to killed him was the same one hunters often use when the deer stand a few feet away from them. When he talked about hunting, Will never imagined he would say it literally.

The evidence he reunited from her drawings proved him five things:

One. Chiyo was hunting people down like animals.

Two. She placed, photographed and drew the victims after their dead.

Three. They looked dead because they were, so that meant that not only she thought of humans as underserving of their lives, but she also saw them undeserving of life in a daily basis.

Four. Aside from the pictures, there was nothing left from the past of those who perished on her hands.

Five. She somehow had an insane amount of free time to design and elaborate her products despite her agitated agenda.

Will brushes some leaves away with his feet to bare the soil. He always carries a little gardening shovel that he uses to find insects hidden in the ground, worms are his main target so he can use them to fish. Ideally, ponds made by the rain or swamps are better to find bait but, since his time today seems to be reduced. He has been digging little holes all morning as he hunted. Some for the insects, some for the rodents.

Chiyo also drew dead animals. Neither of them looked dead but rather sleeping, the only thing that told the truth of the nature behind such drawings were the flower beds and the toys or collars accompanying their owners. They are peaceful drawings of every type of animal she might have ever held, dogs and cats are the most common amongst the pages, followed by rodents and reptiles. Pets.

Those were the only ones Will didn't hide on the chest in his office. No, their space belonged in frames that he hung on his office, only three of them or they would have look suspicious for his wife. The second bag is still unopen so he can take his time evaluating if any face is familiar to him.

Seven of them were already on the data base of his mind, never found, never linked to each other. She did changed her demography a lot. All the cases were forgotten and brushed under the rug as mysterious disappearances once they stood on a dead end. Unrelated, unimportant. Since they were adults, the conclusions to close the cases were bases on their free will to leave their homes or their drug use; to him, knowing they were related to the same woman, felt like going out of his bathtub shouting «eureka!» all around his property.

The sound of the beeps done by his watch alarm echoes through the forest and his whistle is followed by the sound of barks and paws hitting hard the muddy soil. The dogs appear from nowhere, ready to follow him home with the only animals they got to kill that morning. Alana is ought to be amazed by the action considering that the only times he hunts are when something special is coming on–it is, she just doesn't know about it… yet–but Will doesn't think that he needs something special to celebrate in order to follow a new recipe and that the sole fact of being alive after going into the warehouse four days ago is what deserves celebration.

Gutting and fraying the rabbits doesn't take him long. The guts are cleaned and put aside on a container that would go into the fridge in his barn, whilst the skin and fur are washed and left outside to dry. On the kitchen counter is a small card written in both sides with a calligraphy he doesn't recognize.

Kouneli stifado.

The past couple of days have been of a lot of realization. Hours and hours sitting in front of their photos so he can comprehend Chiyo and her intentions better. His letter had been read at least twice a day so he could know what to write next.

His little acolyte is good at insulting him with a polite word, comparing each other and turning them into the same creature. Will was relieved to see that he wasn't mad at him for the rude way he talked, nor the indecision of his actions. Despite his bad manners, he still finds Will worthy, the love expressed in every word printed on the papers is palpable and tender, natural.

And no nightmares or visions have come into his sleep. For that he is thankful, Alana has been at home a lot lately and he was worried of having epiphanies while sleeping with her.

The reason though of why he is completely normal after inspecting Chiyo's job is something he hasn't discover.

As he goes through Chiyo's portfolio and his letters, he has been thinking about the proper excuse to rationalize his plan–and to explain to Crawford why the sudden interest in the corpses, (it is him who needs the excuses for himself, Crawford is happy Will is interested on working with him under whatever circumstances. His favorite hunt dog is back and he couldn't wish for anything else).

This last days of thinking led him to a more stable and calm self that allowed him to wonder what he could do with his intrigue for him and Chiyo. The main reason why he needs to stop him is that his family and friend are in danger as well as many other people from the population, if he can center the bad parts of himself into helping–like many times before–then

all things are possible. He hasn't find what to do with the collateral damages, nor with his curiosity increasing every time he hears the news mentioning him, but if anything goes wrong, his suicide letter will take care of the rest of his story.

To start the formalities that will allow him to be part of the system in the professional ambit, he prohibits himself from even calling his gifts like that. The letters and the drawings aren't for him to keep, they aren't gifts. It is pure evidence against a monster he is chasing and that he is collecting to create the fake sensation of thrust amongst both men. They are clues taking him to the place where his wale is waiting for him to stab him with his harpoon.

He cuts and keeps the pieces of rabbit in Ziploc bags that go into the inner fridge. All happens with mastered practice in what he thinks is his time record; Alana is walking downstairs when he is washing the knives and the blood on his hands.

"Just give me a couple of minutes and I'll have your breakfast ready." Will says in a monotone voice without looking at her, too absorbed into his thoughts. Alana scoffs.

"Good morning."

"Morning." He replies in the same cold way. Chiyo would slap him if she could.

"I can help if you want me to."

Her husband turns to see her. She has a towel on her head and half of her blouse is unbuttoned, her face doesn't show any trace of tiredness or imperfection that should be hidden by her makeup. And she looks beautiful and happy and refreshed with all that tidy mess that is shown by her half put clothes. Alana sits in the counter's stool and places her towel on the stool next to her.

He turns away with a soft smile on his face.

"No, let me do it." The faucet is closed. Will walks to the stove to put the kettle on the fire. "I like feeding you." He lies.

"You have an interesting way of saying «I love you»." She crosses her hands over the counter to rest her chin on them. Will crushes two eggs on the hot pan, causing the oil to jump softly when the liquid touches it.

He frowns, unsure of the type of reaction he is having due to her words. "Why you say so?"

"Food and love have always come hand by hand. Mothers show us their love through food when we are in their bellies until one of us dies. If she can't find the right nutrients for her baby and for her, or if she can't provide a good relationship with the food, the baby will never feel satisfied." As her explanation goes, Will can't find any memory of his mother feeding him, or from his father for the matter. Suddenly cooking feels like a stab of irony in his chest.

He is not cooking out of love, he hasn't think about putting his heart out in a plate for her to find nourishment. This is his routinary interaction with the kitchen every morning after he

wakes before her–if he even slept at all. Alana has eaten his food for years without ever mentioning any inconformity with his skills or with his–apparently–acts of service.

It has become something common into his house that he now does it automatically even if he is sick, but now… now for some reason it means that he loves her.

Since the day they got married the thought of their relationship getting closer and closer to rupture has come into his mind again and again. Some days are better, and some are just a waste. Cooking is no longer an act of love for him, but an act of commodity formed by a mutual agreement done in order to survive their union, but now… now that he is getting ready to go to Crawford… now it means that he loves her?

“I have many ways of saying that I love you.” He replies warily disguising it as tender love. He pours the hot water into the coffee filter to finally serve her beverage. When he turns, her eyes are full of tears refusing to fall.

‘She knows.’ He needs to confirm it before jumping into assumptions.

“Is everything okay?” His whisper is nearly silenced by the sound of the cup hitting the counter. “Alana, what is wrong?”

“Why haven’t you call me «my dear» before?”

‘She knows?’

He and his need to call him «dear». She found the letters and now she is trying to subtly tell him that that is what got her mad. Is not like Will writes pet names to him or that he will ever do it, but she could assume that it is happening thanks to his need to call Will «my dear».

Or she knows Will is going to see the Crawford and she is trying to avoid it by making him have an open-hearted conversation about their relationship. Alana will find the way to make him feel bad for betraying the thrust she put on him, she’ll remind him about how much she loves him and how he can’t leave her for Crawford.

On a more realistic insight, Will never really liked pet naming anyone. It is uncomfortable for him and she knows it; back to when they were dating he tried thousands of ways to call her but he wasn’t comfortable using them, besides, her name alone is beautiful for him so he really didn’t bother to call her something different. She may know this already, so the pet names aren’t the real issue.

Have she found the letters, her approximation to him wouldn’t be so full of pain and distress. She would have screamed and curse her lungs out because the papers were next to the heart and the human skin bags with the thousands of photos of long forgotten victims.

What is it then?

“I don’t kno– I-I guess they never suited me right and… I really have no excuses.” He pauses to read her face. Sadness and loneliness visible in every line of expression engraved in her

face. The frown in his forehead doesn't know if it is there out of concern or fear. "Did I do something wrong?"

She shakes her head. With both her hands she reaches to hold the hand that just put the cup in front of her, it is warm, soft, desperate, fragile. Will is stupid enough to stare into her eyes.

"Is just that… something happened and… I know that these years haven't been the best, but I really miss you, Will. You are all day at home, and I am all the time traveling and putting my soul in my work and… I neglected you." The gasp that comes out of her mouth finally lets the rivers of tears slide down her now pink cheeks. "And you have been doing so many little things to show me that you are a good man and that you love me."

Will turns to look at the pan, then to her. Cooking right now is an act to fool her as much as possible. Like every morning Will fills the tub for her, he makes her coffee and makes her breakfast before she goes to work, she kisses him, they say good bye, and although Will knows she will go to work, she will also go home to the other lover and then return home to him.

Is not that it bothers him that she comes back home empty of love for him because she already spent it on a better place, that isn't the reason why he sometimes can't find any love on him to give her.

But why is she now implying that his routine is an act of love when it is nothing but a script being acted? If he had to show the real love he feels for her, it wouldn't be through food.

"I just didn't see them. You are so good and I never see it." She continues after panting and sobbing. "When I called you that night that you went out–

He isn't sure if he can be called good if he is planning on running behind a killer who is playing chicken with him. He is not good if he will cook for dinner the recipe he sent him. He is not good if he is holding information and evidence in the chest on his office. He is not good if he finds this creature of his… attractive.

Even so, he can't help but feel hopeful with what seems to be her love confession. Somehow she is noticing him after all these years and she is still unaware of the heart under the chest pumping formaldehyde. If Alana loves him again… he has nothing to fear once he finally puts a name to the beast.

He looks her in the eyes, he reads her, what has changed in her to love him so abruptly? Did she sense the snake crawling directly to his feet? Did someone died and made her realize life was too short? Is she scared that Crawford may come and take him away? More importantly, what happened to her lover?

Will sees her soul, his eyes ache and sting weirdly. Her emotions are consuming him. And after another round of sobs, she continues:

"–I noticed that you just called me by my name, and I felt terrible. I felt bad. That is not what I want for me or for you, we were supposed to be together like a team, we were supposed to be a family… and I know, some part deep down in me wants to believe that we can still be a

family. I love you, Will; I am sorry. Please… love me; forgive me. Will, I don't want to lose you, I want to be yours and I want you to be mine, we can have a good life in which we can exist in peace, I know… because you have tried so hard all this time to show that people can really change and become something beautiful, and I want to see your beauty. Life isn't easy, and it is way less gentle to you and your heart, so I shouldn't have neglected you… I love you."

'They rejected her.'

Whoever it was, they rejected her love.

Will is now crying her pain. It feels like a crushing sensation born in his heart that very slowly moves downwards to meet his guts and his bones. These are words he's been waiting to hear all along, repent and love were the things he needed to keep his boat floating.

Hell is living in a house that isn't his anymore; Hell is «loving» a woman that only loves him because someone rejected her; Hell is living alone with a lonely woman that makes him feel even lonelier. This isn't fair.

They stay a couple of minutes in silence with Will debating with himself whether to run out of the room or stay there, anyone can cut the tension on the air with a knife, and if they pay enough attention to Will they can see the mechanisms on his head working hard to get to a conclusion. The back door is so close yet so far from his grip.

Will chuckles and clears his throat whilst Alana waits for his verdict.

Divorcing him was better than coming home crying after her rupture. He was suspicious she was having an affair but now that it is confirmed it hurts him in the deepest part of his soul. He just didn't want to accept the uncomfortable truth because that way he could still have the fake commercial life he was having. He wouldn't come back to live alone with his horrid mind.

'The perfect life I'm trying to build.'

He should be happy for this glorious turn of events. He's been waiting, praying, WISHING for this love confession to happen so, why doesn't it feel enough for him to be satisfied? Nothing has change in his hollow heart.

The wet towel on the stood stains his pants once he is seated, he doesn't feel the water trespassing until it touches his butt, but he is too numb to properly care. He is shaking, feeling like glass under her touch and his heart is skipping beats in the way only heartbroken lovers know how to recognize.

Behind his eyelids appears the image of Alana laying on her left side over the counter with her arm resting on her waist, dead eyes staring into his soul yet showing more life than they did when she was alive. Instead of a gunshot on her chest, there are red/purple marks around her neck creating a collar that paints her nudity. Repulsion and excitement crawl over his skin and looking at her eyes doesn't feel proper anymore.

His deception, anger, commotion and confusion are fighting a war he needs to calm down before Crawford is there.

He wishes he could tell her about how he loves her despite her neglect, that he is ready to start a new life with her and start the family they were supposed to have. That he has been hoping for her to look at him in the way lovers contemplate the soul of their partner, that Will misses her touch and her kisses and her body and her splendid mind and her breath close to his ear.

But it would be a lie to say he can conform with the leftovers of her past interest. His throat stings with the desperation to shout at her until she is nothing but a little ball of shaking nerves. Of course he misses her, and he wants her, he wants to look for the person who rejected her so he can thank them from bringing his wife back home because she belongs to him, and he belongs to her… yet now that is evident that he is the second choice, Alana feels more fake than ever. She should leave like she always does.

She should have fought for their love so, even if he ate the leftovers, she would at least have a place to be save once he becomes him.

'A book full of contradictions that resemblance a contradictory being and his contradictory actions.' No no no no no no! Why now? Why now? Why now? Why now? WHY NOW?

He is not allowed to appear in the middle of his marital problems! And he is definitely not a contradiction or a problem waiting to be solved, he can do this. He can act like a fucking adult and concentrate before Crawford arrives. There are a lot of things to love about Alana, he knows he does; all it takes is a clear mind and forgiveness ready to be given.

Will takes deep breaths to neutralize the rushing sound deafening his coherent thoughts. He counts from zero to ten, from ten to zero.

Alana is not his enemy here.

Alana is his anchor, she keeps him with his feet on Earth so he won't go floating to a world full of danger that, although is addictive, could transform him in the man he desires him to be. She is the reason he is still alive and safe in this world, the reason why he isn't in prison. She is the reason why he knew he was worthy of love and loving so freely and unconditionally. At the end of his journey when he is finally locked up or dead, Alana will be waiting at home for him to live their new life as the family they are meant to be.

Is hard for Will to decipher if he wants her closer or not, or if he has the capacity to forgive her and forget what she did to him behind his back. He thought he was alright with her having another lover who could give her the love he couldn't provide her anymore because he loves her with a sickening passion that allows her to step on him if that means touching her skin.

Dressing as a killer doesn't make him into one. He is lovable, Alana knows that. And he loves her for giving him the chance to love her. Be sincere, he tells himself.

“I love you.” A trembling voice comes out from a trembling body. Well, sincerity for any reason feels disgusting. “I do love you, Alana. I am not good with my feelings, and you know it. I am sorry if I made you think that I didn’t love you because of all my bullshit but that is not the case. I do need you.”

Will stands up slowly to place his body between her legs; Alana’s hands touch his chest making their way to rest in his shoulders, and then they slide to the back of his head. With soft movements she traces circles in his nape, and he shivers under her porcelain, warm touch. A doll with warm hands.

Crying makes her look beautiful; sapphire-blue eyes contrasting with the red veins showing their irritation, her blush running down her neck to install in her chest so it can feel her heart beat going calmer, her tears are flashes of light running still to meet her chin. The only time she stops holding him is to grab a paper towel to clean her nose and cover her mouth to cough.

“I have been waiting for you a long time, I gave you your space, but believe when I say that sometimes I just wanted to beg you to stay.” He leaves her hand and rubs his eyes. They feel like needles stinging his corneas.

“Why didn’t you?” She asks after a cough. Will tucks a lock of her hair behind her ear.

“Because I didn’t want you to fear me. I never wanted you to fear me.” The grimace of guilt in her face makes him feel guilty too. ‘You are going to fear me from now on. You have the right to run, you had the perfect opportunity to do it, Alana. And I am sorry, but I need to become him if I want to keep you safe.’ “I am sick of being afraid of you fearing me, because I never wanted to cause you any pain. I love you, my dear. Let me show you how good I can love you.”

The word «dear» comes out of like acid vomit. It’s gross, full of lumps, and thick. He swallows his revulsion.

Will used to think that if this day of confession would have come in a different way with Alana admitting gifting her love to a new lover instead of asking for reconciliation, she would have beg for his forgiveness because «he is very dear to her and she didn’t want to lose his friendship», and because he is a fool in love, he would have hugged her and kissed her right away to try to make her stay and remember the most minimum glimpse of love she still had for him. Or maybe he would scream at her, break her heart and jump out of the window to end his life because he couldn’t live without her.

Both thoughts vanish as soon as he hears her laugh before kissing him. His kiss becomes more intense and his body burrows further between her thighs. How hungry has he been for this tasteless meal?

Alana finds the way to pull him closer from the edge of his jeans and he can’t help but begin to touch every inch of skin that could feel right for both of them, it starts like a caress on her back moving downwards to her waist where he softly squeezes. Her hips come next and he pulls her closer to his thighs to make more space for him.

He must smell of blood and earth and she is kissing him and letting him kiss her. Alana grips his hair as she opens her mouth to let his tongue touch hers, Will holds her nape to agree with the friction of tongues wandering for familiar places. Is not enough for him. He wants to touch her more and to be touched by her so he can feel her fingers caressing every part of him, he wants to be warmth by her body and to be hold until they fall asleep. But he can't help feeling that what they are doing is anormal, like he is the secret lover and the person who rejected Alana is the real spouse.

His meal has all the flavors in the world ready for him to consume her. Will kisses from her cheeks to her ear and the zone behind it, down her neck to then return to her lips, he doesn't adventure to go further, it would be too soon to do something like that. Alana shivers every time he holds her neck or if he presses her lower back, fragility isn't any more a sensation that can turn his skin into glass but it is now the feeling of holding Alana in his hands.

She can break in the minute he decides to let her shatter in the floor, and he is in love with the idea.

Will can't think any more, he needs this. To consume her and let himself be consumed by her mouth, her mind… *be reborn*. Alana recognizes his urge; she opens her legs to give him more room that he forces himself not to accept no matter how much he wants to be mixed with her. He breaks the kissing session to look her attentively into her eyes so he can know what to do next, if she is okay with a stranger taking her.

She stares back at him with tears in her eyes and a new blush of excitement going down her body. He doubts to continue when the feeling finally kicks, and realization illuminates his mind. If he goes any further, this will be sex out of spite. She is letting him touching her to forget the person she loves. Will doesn't care anymore, *he missed her.*

He is going back to kiss her, to touch every place he hasn't allowed himself to touch…

The front door is open in a slam that lets in heavy steps rushing towards them. He jumps and turn to look at the woman who takes the decorative blanket from one of the couches and then rushes to wet it on the sink so she can place it over the burning pan and turn off the stove that Will completely forgot. *(So that was why he was feeling like he was drowsy and sleepy…)*.

Alana coughs and jumps out of the stool to adjust her skirt. Meanwhile Will rushes to open the back door so the three of them can run outside to have fresh air.

They cough and clear their throats and the tears of sadness become tears produced by the irritation for all the smoke that got into them.

"Was it necessary to make out when cooking breakfast?" Asks Beverly after recovering her breath.

Will and Alana blush looking at each other for the mess they made. It was good the flame was low, and the stupid egg only burned to become black. None of them noticed the moment their intoxication began–or if it even began before Beverly arrived–he wants to laugh for all the reason one laughs but it just comes out as a dizzy grin that Alana copies.

Will looks at the barely visible smoke coming out from one of the windows Beverly opened before going out, Chiyo is standing near the stove with great curiosity in the man who loves her drawings; they both look downwards. He wasn't even excited about being with Alana.

Again the picture of Alana posing as the dead man come into his mind with a strength that tells him Chiyo is mad with his selection for choosing salvation and pureness over him and his gifts–no, not gifts, *evidence*. He stares at her with the same angry look in his face: he was right to choose light over darkness, he tells her.

The problem with Alana is solved, he will make sure to keep her safe and show her how good he can love her. He'll have a place to return after everything ends.

"We have weird dead wishes." Alana jokes when she is done buttoning her blouse, earning a reproachful look from Beverly. For her might be a joke, but Will is too serious when he plays like that. "It was my fault, I distracted Will."

"Yeah, I can see that." She turns to look at the dogs rushing to greet their almost moribund owners. "Since you two are alright I'll be waiting in my car for Will." She whistles to Will, he turns immediately. Good boy. "Leaving when you ready."

"Why?" Alana crosses her arms over her chest. Excitement gives room to doubt.

"Got a suspect swearing they know «the author». Just need him to confirm it, no talking no facing each other." She lies easily. "I would have objected the opposite if I wasn't sure he wouldn't be okay, Alana."

Beverly's gaze is tender and her confidence is impeccable; the light of the sun makes her look angelical and pure under the eyes of the woman she is trying to convince. Her skin has regained more color since the last time Will saw her and it glows like clear honey. Even he almost believes her for that. Alana turns to look at Will but he avoids her eyes as he nods slowly to reassure her that he will be fine.

Is easy to pretend her lie is the truth because there is a suspect, and the suspect does know the author, and they haven't faced each other yet. The only thing she got wrong was the talking, and although it isn't proper talking, they are sharing words.

"He'll back for dinner?" Alana asks.

The woman nods frenetically to proceed walking out of their sight. "And I'll be here for dinner too. Let's go, William!"

He walks towards his wife, holding her by her hips so she can face him and he plants a kiss on her forehead. She holds his jaw with both hands, smiling to the tingling feeling that his short beard produces on her palms. They look at each other closely, inspecting the emotions emanating from every line, every shape, every color, every sound.

"I'm going to prepare you something special."

Her smile transforms to a concerned grin. “Promise me you won’t come with something attached to your back. Beverly can come, but just her.”

Will laughs. “I won’t.” He kisses her lips, her cheeks, behind her ear. She hugs him. “May I know what put you like this?”

“One of my friends lost her fiancé, it really made me think about a lot of things. I realized that I couldn’t imagine living without you.” She lies.

“You don’t have to imagine it. My life belongs to you.” He lies.

“And can I ask since where did you got that bracelet? I’ve never seen it before.”

Both of them look at the trinket around his wrist. It is a contrast of dark colors highlighting the pure white color of the medium-size balls. Each white orb is separate from its companions thanks to small beads made with black wood decorated with golden geometrical shapes on their surfaces, varnished and polished to reflect the light projected by the bigger balls. A stylish clasp made with gold completes the ends of the bracelet, ensuring it stays in place.

Everything was handmade. From the bones being transformed into pearls to the black wood being engraved and polished. And the result of all those hours of hard work has resulted in something that even he can’t reject, had it been another type of gift–no, not a gift, evidence–then he wouldn’t use it. But this one is pretty, discreet. An insignia to tell him Will is in the game, ready for the next move and with an open mind. If he is going to be obsessed over a murderer, then he might as well use it for his own benefit.

His words are caught in his throat, leaving him without a proper answer to please Alana's curiosity. She holds his hand up to look at the detail of every piece, not recognizing the white material.

‘Human.’ He wants to tell her. *‘Or pork, according to them.’*

Abraham Parker is the name of the man on his wrist. Chiyo left a photo of him along with two drawings, one of which was him posing unnaturally and the second was of all the products that she could make with his remains, there were a lot of annotations for the bracelet, most of which involved the mistakes and achievements of her experiments while she worked with the bones.

Will was surprised by his lack of repulsion when he first wore it out of mere curiosity, and he forgot to take it out after he got distracted with the next papers he was analyzing. Now it forms part of his plan, he wants to call his attention, then he might as well play along, agree to his pleas, and stab him once they are closer to each other.

“I decided to try something different. «Healing takes time» and I just wanted to look for something to help me heal. Try something different.” The quote he does of her own words wins him a beaming smile from her. “I can take it off if you want to.”

“No. I like how it looks on you.” That makes him smile with pleasure.

They close the distance between them to start a new session of kisses soon interrupted by a claxon on the other side of the property. Alana rolls her eyes while he laughs.

“I have to go or she’ll kill me and there won’t be dinner for anyone.”

“Is okay, go. I’ll see you later.”

A quick kiss on the cheek and he walks out of her embrace to meet Beverly on her car.

The crunch of the branches and leaves breaking under his feet are the beginning of the end of his chapter with Alana, an incident that wasn’t supposed to happen but he is glad it went like that. However, he knows the façade he is about to play is the one of a man who doesn’t allow people in his life, someone who will openly admit wanting to kill his creation to bring peace.

He brushes off the sensation of Alana’s fingers brushing his hair and the taste of her lips on his. Won’t do any good to show any bit of hope.

Beverly smiles at him when he gets into the car. There is a box with cookies and a thermos with coffee waiting for him that he takes without much interest, the movement of his hand raising the thermos lid to his mouth makes her glance at his wrist.

“Nice bracelet.” She says and he nods.

The car leaves the house and the barking dogs behind; Will doesn’t look at his home so he can avoid having second thoughts. The main road is clear, there aren’t many cars despite it being a Monday morning on early hours.

“Thanks.” He eats a cookie before speaking again. “So, Jack sent you as his peon?”

“He told me that last time he was here you told him that Alana would kill him. He didn’t want to risk getting murder just when a new body has been discovered.”

Will sighs; another cookie goes down his throat with extreme difficulty. “I thought I was going to be working on the previous cases.”

“Well, someone decided to give you a «welcome back» gift. Right out of the oven, she doesn’t have more than six hours. Some drunk girls found her this morning. Gosh, they were brave.”

“Is this his third?” He asks out careless of Beverly’s reaction.

“I mean… not really, but yeah, you can say she is his third. Why?”

‘So I still have time to see the fourth.’ “Just to know how close we are to him before he goes into break again.”

“Any reason why he does this on Summer?”

“Vacations. There is a lot of movement due to people coming and going on vacation, he can mix with the other travelers easily. If he works under any institution then he might as well

have time to put his tableaus out now that the vacation period starts."

"But what if he is his own employer? That can give him free time any time he wants without worrying about schedules or stuff like that."

"Then it is with the intention to attract the attention of everyone around. The news are more active on this season and on times of national events, he needs to win coverture with his murders so they can reach the writer. He is trying to catch his attention."

"That wouldn't freak me out if I didn't know you are the writer." She shrugs, without taking her eyes out of the road she asks: "How are you okay with that?"

He looks at her with not recognizable emotion on his face, it is a serene expression that doesn't recognize the danger of the situation. Quiet waters aren't always safe, they both know this. He is not okay with anything going on around him but he grew used to ignore the problems on the outside world just to keep his mind at ease, that way he would be in peace in the bubble of ignorance he built. The first months after his dismissal he used to watch the news every day almost religiously so he could be informed about the chaos going on outside of his house.

That was soon forgotten until he came into his life. Is not like likes to see destruction and death reproducing non-stop on his computer, but he must admit that there are cases that he can't simply ignore. There are monster he can't hide forever under his bed or inside his closet.

"I'm okay." He says slowly.

The rest of their trip is in silence, with Beverly taking some of the cookies from the container and with Will drinking must of the coffee on every stop so he won't spill the hot liquid on his lap.

It happened once and Beverly looked more worried about her car than the burn on Will's leg. From that moment he learned what it means to be her friend, as long as he knew how to drink inside her car then there wouldn't be any problems in between them.

Will watches the buildings and the cars changing sizes and colors with every turn they take; the day looks mournful thanks to the gray sky and the green trees that somehow look lifeless from all the dust covering their leaves, even with the last squalls cleaning the streets there will always be a way to remind the Earth that it isn't free of those who ruin it. Chiyo would have hated it, the smog skies and the decorative flowers made with plastics were her enemies, he knows because she made some annotations about it in one of her drawings.

He looks to his right, a woman is almost choking her dog with the leash as she walks by in a hurry, she is worried about her next meeting with the pet-friendly investors of her company, the only reason she bought the dog was to have their thumbs up so she could have the money for her brand «free of animal cruelty». The dog doesn't even like her, it spends more time with its nanny than with the busy woman that always ends up pulling too hard from its leash.

One of this days it might feel the need to bite her when she is kissing it for a video. Small dogs can be vicious when they are mad, they can be dangerous and show that even with all the evolution and genetical modifications scientists have done to their bodies, they can still take their owners eyes out. And when that happens, well… Chiyo won't be there to spare its life and take it to a better place where it will live the life it deserves until someone responsible adopts it.

A glimpse of the sun shows from behind a thick cloud with optimism; it's still there to accompany him on his trip and to tell him that there aren't many probabilities of an early rain, either way, he can't always thrust this and all that is left if for him to wish for the perfect, cloudy mood for the case. Not a lot of sun but not a lot of rain either, or else it would make it difficult for the cameras to take decent photos.

Their destination takes them longer than he thought. For his own amusement, the weather seems to get better and sunnier when they come near the bay.

This is perfect for a day on the beach with his dogs, running under the sun to get tanned while his dogs drink too much salty water that they end up in the vet, vomiting and shitting around. He would spent the whole night regretting having his skin burned and not having one of his kids at home because they never understand when enough water is enough.

It is also a perfect day to drink a lot of liquids, preferably with vodka and a lot of ice. In the commodity of a beach chair. Under a big umbrella. With shorts and no shirt. Preferably earlier in the morning so the beach wouldn't be full of people and the sun wouldn't be as unbearable as it is now.

And preferably not with a body starting to smell like rotten eggs after being left for two days on a car.

Will looks at the place where the forensic team is reunited with a sad expression on his face. His lips stretch into a thin line that vanishes as soon as it comes.

She is laying on the sand as if she were sleeping in a fetal position, uncovered from the summer sun and the curious eyes; flashes of red, purple and golden colors make presence in the canvas contrasting with the color of the sand and her pale skin. This «Danae» is almost an exact replica of the real one, yet the fabric representing the golden rain running between her thighs looks wrong, impure and unholy, darkened by her blood red as the hair on her head. Pleasure has been shadowed by fear and pain deeply impregnated on her face.

He spotted Freddy's face when they–finally, after all the traffic, and Beverly's need to pee every opportunity she found–arrived. They didn't look similar, but the image of the dead girl really gave honor to the picture Will imagined all those days ago when he found the inspiration to idealize her death. Which made sense since «Danae» was inspired by a violent impulse that Freddy unleashed on him one night after being harassed by her stupid questions about his dismissal.

He is not sure if she knows or if she doesn't know where the inspiration came from.

Either way, there won't be an easy way for her to know that he is the one responsible of the canvas that gave image to the real murder.

The character on his book had the intention from the beginning to show that beauty that only someone like Freddy could dress. But his doesn't show any of that elegance that Will tried to portray, something that he already expected but couldn't accept completely. The poor execution of the murders are betrayal to his own imagination and he wonders if the next would really make a difference from the rest.

Crawford gives him a little badge with his photo and the words: special agent, Will Graham. The same one he had before he left the FBI, it is still impeccable and in good shape, it has been waiting for this moment for a long time. Will put it around his neck before the police's yellow tape raises for them to enter. The glasses on his face slide downwards thanks to his sweat, drawing a black line that cuts the faces of the people around him and gives him the security that he is not really interacting with others.

If he can't see their faces, he can't see their pity.

As they walk towards «Danae», Will watches the four young women being interrogated by police. One of them is a blonde girl throwing up her guts out while one of her friends–another blonde–hugs her, a third girl with purple hair is holding the hand of the fourth girl as she speaks with the police while her girlfriend has her eyes stuck in the painting with an absent stare. Sometimes, her girlfriend brushes her brunette hair to distract herself from the questions she doesn't know how to answer.

The brunette and Will exchange quick, emotionless glances before he turns to see the body on the sand.

Jimmy and Brian are inspecting it, focused on something on her ribs that they find odd. The man with the short straight hair looks at him first with a frown that Will copies unconsciously, his expression doesn't change even when he recognizes his old college standing in front of him.

"I told you Klimt is my favorite artist. Never imagined that I would end up looking at a murder inspired on him." He says in a mumble that sounds apologetic, as if he doesn't want the corpse to listen to him. Will isn't sure if he is remorseful of telling him about «Danae» or if he is apologetic towards the girl.

"Really? Not even after reading the book four times?" Jimmy asks mockingly.

"No. I thought our killer would be in prison before he could even get this far." Both Jimmy and Brian shrug in synchrony. Mutual understanding and agreement. "Is nice to see you again, by the way. I– I can't believe you are back."

The man with curly hair nods in agreement with a smile that Will can barely perceive due to the glasses. Will gives them a crooked smile before turning his face down to «Danae»; Beverly is already wearing her gloves when she comes closer to them, a clipboard in hand that she hands to Jimmy.

“Her name is Vanessa Jones. 45 years old. She was one of those super models who barely grow old.” Jimmy tells Crawford and Will while Beverly starts examining the body. Her face of disgust when she sees the lacerations on the woman’s side. “Disappeared one day ago, proximately nine hours since her death, no signs of fighting or resistance, but–”

Will scowls when he sees the «but» that the fabrics and Beverly’s body had been covering. Jimmy continues, pointing at the several lacerations made on her back. “It seems that our killer took a step forward this time. He tortured her. The bruises and cuts done on her back could've been done with a something large, similar to a stick or a whip. She was also cut to retrieve organs, probably the liver. Cause of death on first instance: hemorrhages. She bled through the stiches but there isn’t must blood here.”

“The killer might have cleaned her like the other victims, and the ropes did their best to absorb the rest of blood that could come out of her. Either way, is not enough to determinate if there could be evidence elsewhere that isn’t the place where he works or the car in which he transports them.” Brian adds. To Will he says: “Our theory is that he is becoming unstable, or that he might be entering into a psychotic break.”

“It would explain the sudden change of aggression if there is a loss of his senses while works.” Says Crawford, Beverly calls a photographer to take shots of every angles she commands while the men keep speaking. “The question here is what triggered the psychotic break. Can we know if this behavior on her back has something to do with a sexual play?”

“We’ll see in the lab if there is any sign of sexual activity, but I doubt it.” Beverly speaks getting the men to lower their heads to look at her. “Rape victims often have more bruises around their bodies, these were super centered in once single place, done with purpose–” Her voice is barely loud since she is distracted checking for other wounds on her flesh without manipulating her more than necessary. “There aren’t signs in her wrists or ankles that can be associated with a play. Had she not being tied then there would have been more bruises on other sides of her body for trying to escape, or some sign of a fight. A lot of people who practice BDSM use whips for their plays, but this is taking it too far.”

“She is also a model. Permitting some kind of games can be counterproductive if they leave a mark.” Jimmy adds. “Less casts, less apparitions on magazines. Even taking imperfections out with photoshop costs a fortune so they have to be very careful with their bodies to please the next producer.”

Brian does a grimace of incredulity and Jimmy answers with a shrug. “What? My wife loves this things. I’m trying to be affectionate by hearing her prattle about this.”

“Maybe he wanted to take it this far,” Crawford interrupts them this time before they can start another silly discussion of theirs. “the emotion of punishing her is too good to let it go easily and he just escalates. He enters in a dissociative episode and he can’t listen to her telling him to stop.”

Crawford looks at Will who shakes his head in disagreement.

“Even if she were his partner, he wouldn’t have a reason to hurt her like that. Every detail on her is controlled, the organ extraction will show medical precision–obsessive perfection

even–and all this couldn't have been done in that state. Having presented it, he would have disposed from the body because she wasn't perfect to be shown. He wasn't the one having a psychotic break, and if it were like that, he would have come with something more aggressive than just whips." He makes a movement so Beverly can push the corpse to show her back. "He could have destroyed her, or he could've forgotten her somewhere until the break came to an end. His enjoyment doesn't prohibit him from knowing exactly what he is doing, everything starts and ends as soon as the mutilation is done. This doesn't look like him."

"A copycat?" Jimmy tries to guess.

"Or he is killing with someone else."

"He is just giving someone the chance to interfere with his job."

Will loses his sight in the cuts along her back, already taking off his glasses. He isn't aware of his surroundings anymore when Crawford calls everyone out of the scene to clear the area, nor he feels how Beverly pats his back before leaving to wish him luck.

The numb sensation that squeezes his body comes to him along with the sound of the waves breaking on the shore like it did a year ago when he met Chiyo, it is joined too by the blinding light that bounces on the white sand directly into his eyes like clouds around a memory.

Behind his eyelids he can see his own ocean made of decomposing bodies, steady and quiet; no wave crashes on the shore here and there aren't any visible tides running on its surface; he is not afraid this time of swimming inside it once the pendulum let's him see the real panorama.

He'll find him there.

Will opens his eyes to look at a woman with the hair like fire just to find that she is pale and tasteless for the moment. The fire hasn't touch her skin and there is too much work to do before she can be shown to the public eye. Her copper hair is spilled on the floor like a flower on bloom. Resemblance of a copper cushion, a long-lasting and beautiful flower, as the love he holds for him.

He is once again at home. No dogs, no wife. But there is a shadow standing on a corner, it looks like him but its essence is different from the one he is made of, it is more aggressive and unpolite, it is sitting at the edge of a cliff it is anxious to fall from so it can play with the toy under Will. He turns to see at the unconscious woman laying over the surgical table he placed on his living room.

He stands by her side with the scalpel on hand, the things he'll use for the extraction are already prepared and clean like her flesh on a surgical cart.

The cut is simple, calculated, delicate; there is a sort sensation of pride when taking out the organ, not because the extraction was perfect–as it always is–but because this is the beginning of its purpose. It isn't like killing Chiyo, but then again, nothing will ever feel like

killing Chiyo, yet there is power and power feels magic. Like electricity running through his fingertips and crawling the hairs on his skin.

Will makes his way through the woman's interior to collect her organ. Viscous, soft, hot. Once the extraction is completed, he closes everything with careful stitches.

"I don't have much interest in you... you have a purpose–admirable purpose–but I don't find any pleasure in the process, because I'm not the one who will kill you. I'm not the one letting your blood run."

The shadow by his side comes to the light revealing a Will different from the one he saw after killing Chiyo and the one he saw the night he went for the first time to Somerville. This one is more lethal, less controlled when it comes to killing, some could say that he is inexperienced bottling up his feelings and the rage that blooms on Will's guts. He gives space for the new Will. The Will who puts the woman face down so he can have his way on her.

"It is me who you should fear." The fake Will takes a long, wood stick on his hand. He strikes once to wake the woman from her unconscious state; she snarls in pain before the second hit comes but she doesn't move. She can't. They injected something on her. "We took what we needed from you, now it's my turn to use you for my own design. My desire is to see you in pain, to have you howling for mercy and in desperation."

Three, six, ten, twenty-four...

Fake Will pants every time the stick breaks her skin. Sweat forms in his forehead and his sight is clouded by a blur that lets him know about the exhaustion the work gives him. His arms hurt and tense when he applies strength to the next him, he suffers with her but he enjoys what the pain causes him. Everything will soar tomorrow morning, but it all would be worth once he gets to expose her to the world.

"I need to see the blood coming out of your back," He pulls his hand up. It falls in a rush making a sharp noise when the stick breaks the air. The sound is nicer when the whip hits the skin with extreme force. "to know that all you can think before dying is me."

The sound of skin breaking mixes with the screams and whines produced directly from the model's chest. Her cry is something profound and colorful on the ears of her captor and her executioner. Little by little, her skin begins to gain a strong red color that only incites him to hit harder, letting all the stress go on her. It won't be enough until he sees the blood, he won't stop until he sees the skin swelling.

"All the anger. All the pain. All the things I've been containing... they are a gift for you." He breathes hard with every stroke; the exercise is consuming. "And all you can do is to stay still to receive my gift."

She bleeds uncontrollably, the thick red blood is darker than her hair and it runs down to her sides, flooding the surgical table and falling to stain the floors of his house. He doesn't care for his floors when all that exists is him and her. The blood looks purer than he imagined and it excites him to know that now that it is finally open, he can enjoy a new type of sound coming from her.

“Is a shame he won’t see you like this... I really wanted him to see you dying, you were so pretty and so good. He would have loved you... but don’t you worry, he’ll know you were meant for him.”

Outside of his house is a stag black as the night and big enough to break the stairs if it isn’t careful. It’s the first time they meet but there is some sense of familiarity amongst them. It looks at Will and Will looks at it to ask for permission to continue his job; it hits its hoof against the floor to encourage him, to encourage his rage. His destruction.

With a triumphant smile, Will raises his hand once again to let it fall as fast and has as he can...

“Excuse me? You can’t be here, sir.”

Will comes abruptly out of trance. His head hurts making him feel dizzy for a moment.

He is not sure if he is smiling or not, but the light of the sun hitting on the sun provokes a grimace of disgust that hides away any sign of joy. The person standing in front of him has short brown hair, blue eyes and her uniform gives her the appearance of someone rigid; she is a student from the academy, to say the least. Under her left arm is a manila folder and on her other arm is her backpack. She looks at him with severity and for a moment, he feels threatened.

“No... you aren’t supposed to be here.”

“Starling!” Jack shouts from behind. He looks goofy walking fast on a surface that wants to engulf him every time he gives a step. The suit on a hot day on the beach doesn’t help him either. “You are interrupting a current investigation; you better have an excuse to enter in the scene without previous authorization.”

She looks hesitant when the man comes closer, in her expression is a mix of fear and remorse that she doesn’t try to hide. Her voice is confident, nevertheless, she knows that it’ll be worse if she doubts in front of Crawford.

“I was sent as an intern for your profiler, Sir. I’m starting my practices under your supervision.” She gives Crawford the folder under her arm, then she looks at Will again. He is focused on the body and the deep cuts engraved on her skin; his stomach growls but no one seems to care about it. “I was told to come here to help in the case, but when I arrived the place was alone, so I assumed that–”

“Silence.” Crawford interrupts her. She holds into a position so stiffen that Will can feel some pain on his back just from looking quickly at her. They stay in silence while their boss deliberates scolding her or not. “Prunell sent you to spy on me.”

“That’s not what I...”

“Is not a question.” Crawford interrupts her again. He then looks at Will. “She knows that you are here. She put a spy to see that you are doing okay because she believes that we are biased by you.”

“Is smart to not trust in the man who agreed on having me fired but then called me twice into crime scenes. Nor the man known as «unstable».” He answers softly. “This wasn’t a break, Jack. Whoever did this was highly motivated by their anger, he let them play, have fun. He knew that no matter how harsh they were it was easy to cover it so the body wouldn’t show any defect when displayed because he thrust in them enough to know that their ire is controlled and focused. He didn’t dispose of her because she is already perfect even damaged…”

‘I kill for perfection–’

His voice goes down as he talks until it meets complete silence. The woman isn’t perfect, she is damaged, but so is Will. After all, he doesn’t kill to just achieve perfection but he kills for perfection itself. It is all a lure to keep Will’s eyes on the crimes.

After Will doesn’t acknowledge Clarice into the investigation. Crawford sighs knowing that he must intercede or Will won’t even talk to his intern for the duration of her internship.

“Agent Starling, this is the Special Agent, Will Graham. He is the profiler that you were sent to assist. Graham, this is Clarice Starling. She’ll be around you when you come into the cases.”

He takes a quick glance; her hand stretches out for him to hold but he avoids it with a simple head shake. “I work alone.”

“They are worried about you looking alone.”

“Well, I’m worried about someone telling Prunell that apparently I’m feeling happy every time I’m looking. If they want her here, she will make her own profile, but I’ll be left alone to look. Then we compare our notes.” His arched brow let’s her know that it isn’t a suggestion but an order. She nods without questioning his words, it makes him want to say that his authority isn’t as absolute as Crawford but it will be useless. She is well trained to follow commands.

His superior gives him her folder. Is not surprising for him to find out that she is exceptional in every subject, her extracurricular courses and diplomas are similar to the ones he had in his curriculum when he started working as a teacher. The only thing that differentiate them are the screening procedures. She passed.

“You do your job, and she’ll do hers. As long as none of you tries to sabotage the other then she won’t have anything to report from you.”

“Or as long as I don’t kill anyone again.” He whispers without thinking. “These two are sadists but the one who tortured her was raging. They are young, they find more pleasure in the process than in results. It will be weird if they take part of the murder again, we can even put it as an isolated event.”

“So there are now two murderers behind the writer?” Clarice asks him. He turns to see her with a frown, is more confused than annoyed.

“What do you think?”

The young woman stares at the body in silence, she doesn’t answer. Her head becomes full of questions and answers that Will can’t listen but he can see them coming out of her ears.

“How can we catch him?" Crawford asks both of them.

‘Don’t. Not yet.’ Will thinks.

“We can lure him.” Clarice says.

Both men look at her, curious of her answer.

“If the writer identity is still unknown then we can put someone under the light. Conferences, interviews, photos... everything where we can show a face. The killer will find a way to come closer to his idol and to know them, we can use his obsession against him.”

“It won’t work.” ‘He already knows me.’ “He wouldn’t show himself so easily. He’ll live under the radar until he is tired,” Will answers bitterly.

“Tired of what? Killing?” Crawford scuffs.

“Tired of me not responding.”

Reading the posts on TattleCrime is something he never fancied. Is tasteless but is a necessary evil for modern society. Cheap entertainment charged with drama and morbidity serves as a good study point for society’s lack of empathy. It has always been like this from ancient times, it won’t change from night to morning, yet he always believed that his great contribution is talking shit about it any time he has a chance.

Now he feels that not only is he betraying his wife for working for Crawford, not only is he betraying Crawford for talking with a murderer, but he is also betraying himself for reading every page Freddy dedicated him so he can learn something else. Will made sure to be spotted by her when he arrived at the beach, so he is waiting for his own picture too. And it better be a good one where everyone can see the bracelet on his wrist. She was right to say that he needs her, but the real job hasn’t started for her until he is sure about his next movement.

A folder with a bunch of papers interrupt his investigation when they cover the phone. He turns it off so no one can see how he is breaking his rules. Beverly smiles when he takes the folder off her hand.

“Natasha Bateman and Louis Freeman. 38 and 40, respectively. No trace of drugs on their systems and a lack of organs like the others. They were incredibly clean when he examined their bodies. No signs of violence or torture. They’re pretty standard if you ask me.”

Will reads the medical reports without much surprise. He wasn’t expecting anything weirder from them. “They were found farther from where the first round was found?”

“Yes. Either he is dragging us to him or he is taking us away from his place.”

“The second would be best.” He bites his lip. “They all have been naked with the exception of Tsubame.”

Saying her fake name makes him feel weird now that he knows the truth, as if he is hiding a war criminal behind his walls while he lives freely on the outside. It also feels weird because he knows they aren’t the same person for him. Tsubame was a helper Chiyo a killer, both of them are dead yet only one of them is still torturing him.

“The psychiatrist that’s been helping us with the case said that it might be part of the need to differentiate her from the rest.” Brian says from his seat. He has his eyes stuck in some lab results that he’s been analyzing for too long.

“Well, it’s also the need to mock them after their dead. He is punishing their ugliness.” Will points out softly.

“Yeah. Except for Danae.” Jimmy responds.

“But that is precisely why he let his accomplice play in this game.” Starts Clarice. “He was giving her one last indignity. If he couldn’t make of her naked body a joke, if he couldn’t use it to hurt her pride even after death, then he would have to leave marks to show his contempt for her.”

Will does a jagged nod in agreement. “Tsubame was perfect for him. No ugliness, just beauty. In her work and in her life. The rest are just pigs, but she… she is a proper gift.”

“What was so magic about her?” Beverly asks as she re-reads Chiyo's medical report.

(They gave the body to her friends to cremate her. After collecting enough evidence and DNA for future investigations, they acknowledged that the retention of the body for more than a year could've brought them problems, and now Chiyo was ashes in a little box or in the middle of the ocean. And Will has her heart at home. At the end he couldn't give it back to her even if he wanted to–and he wanted to–, and he lost the chance to see her one last time.

From what he knows, there were some FBI agents in the ceremony the people close to her made to celebrate her funeral, but they didn't have any luck finding suspects that might lead them to him. It was a shame that he wasn't able to accompanied them even as part of the investigation, some part of him knows that he would've been able to spot him in the multitude without any base to fundament his superstitions–which were correct most of the time.

Now all he has from her are the pictures Crawford showed him and the weird phantom that follows him around, not exactly her but an illusion of how he believed her to be in real life. He has to conform with it either way).

Will looks at the picture over the table where he and the others had sprayed the rest of the reports. She is peaceful and the smile on her face impulses him to answer Beverly’s question.

“He just loved her.” Will shrugs. “Or at least he believes that he loved her. For someone like him, love is enough to kill humanity or stop world hunger. She meant some kind of holiness he isn't showing to the others, that's why he needs to differentiate them from her through brutality.”

Jimmy puts the pictures of the lacerations and incisions for organ removal one next to the others. With a Sharpie he signals the shapes made on flesh. “The incisions were made with medical precision, which declares that he is a doctor or has medical knowledge. Clean cuts and likely done whilst they were alive. Only she has a lobotomy but I doubt that it was to reduce the pain, I think that he wanted her to just be awake when he killed her.”

“His preferences are also more centered in the details and purpose than in the process of extraction itself.” Clarice says, winning an approbatory nod from Will that makes her sit more proudly on her chair. She continues when no one else talks. “He is extravagant in his actions; I’ll dare to say that even his personality shows it. Yet, he is careful in his tasks, maybe even showing OCD traits. Amicable not only in his killing but also in his daily life. Likely capable to reproduce other’s works to hide his own.”

Will likes her. Clarice is the kind of smart person that surpasses her teachers in short time, attentive and passional about her job. She is the person Will wants to change lives with, someone who will actually enjoy her job instead of being terrified of the skin she has to wear in order to catch the new devil in turn. From the moment she heard that Will was his romantic interest, she didn’t questioned it and he was glad for that.

But she is too smart, even for her own good.

Chiyo stands next to her, interested in her actions and her personality, almost smelling her. Will shakes his head to erase her from his imagination before he can start behaving erratic thanks to her own curiosity.

Brian talks after Clarice.

“Adding more to his list of experience… we started looking at the data base for organs open to donation, donors and receptors who could have received the organs he extracted from the victims in the days before and after their dead. In case he is taking their guts and putting them on patients.”

“No, no.” Will passes his fingers through his hair, tired. “He would never do that. Having her heart pumping on someone else’s chest would be like dishonoring her. Her destiny was to die so every part of her must be dead. And the other medical trophies he is taking might be on jars for his own amusement. His is a killer who enjoys the result of his work, he is likely to revive the experience by conserving their organs somewhere he can see them.”

“Maybe he even has them in an altar made for the author.” The sentence comes out of Clarice against her will.

By the expression on her face is easy to recognize that she feels bad for saying it out loud. Everyone stays silent. The three techs look at each other perfectly aware to whom she is referring and the implication of her words.

When they turn to look at Will for any reaction, they find him focused on the pictures of the first two new murders. Boring unlike «Danae», and she is boring unlike Chiyo. Beverly looks at him with worried eyes that he refuses to see, Will just shrugs as if there is nothing to be worried about–because there is not.

“Then...” Brian clears his throat to change the attention back to someone that isn't Will. “Is he retired?”

Jimmy answers before the profilers. “An active doctor with a lot of free time is more convincing. Or even unemployed. Retired means he is old and the way he has been kidnapping and displaying them doesn't show any traces of weakness.”

“Old not always means weak.” Brian responds back. “There are a lot of people who are strong for their age...”

“We would have catch him by now if he were one in a million. That type of people hardly passes inadvertently.”

“I’m not talking about «senile old». The average age of retirement is 60, you saying a 60 year old man can’t be strong?”

“I’m just saying that if I was a 60 year old retired doctor I would do better things with my life than building shrines for Will.” Jimmy points at Will with his pencil, his raised brows wrinkles his forehead. “I mean, there are better ways to spend my money than luring a man who will put a gun on my head.”

Beverly sends him a reproachful glance that has him looking down apologetic.

Will only chuckles because of their verbal tussle. “He is older than me but not that old. Unemployed is not a viable answer either, as far as we know he can be a mortician or a surgeon. His experience comes from years of practice in the field, so students are discarded too.”

Jimmy smiles proudly and Brian rolls his eyes.

“So, he has experience killing and saving lives. What a contradiction.” Beverly nods in agreement with Clarice statement. “Agent Graham, do you think he will display his next killing soon?” She asks cautiously, still afraid to call him by his first name–as requested–and afraid of asking the wrong questions in front of someone with more experience.

He wants to tell her that there is no use on her holding back her curiosity but he bites his tongue before it can come out. Chiyo is standing now by his side, the smell of flowers lingers in the air bringing him memories of the night he met her and the night he went for the first time to the warehouse. They weren’t there the second time.

The next body might as well be already waiting for them somewhere. He is sure that he wouldn’t want to leave her on her own for too long so the flowers won’t die if police doesn’t find her soon. He might be displaying her now as they talk. Will tells that to Clarice.

“Then we should be telling someone, security could be raised in a radius of 100 miles from the places where he left the new round of bodies.” She says with severity.

Will shakes his head. His wife is expecting dinner and he wants to see the body before the coroner gives the indication to bring her to the lab. “He won’t put her on the beach. Too hot for the flowers to survive without getting affected by the decomposition process. He will find another place for her.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know.” He shrugs indifferently. Clarice seems surprised by his relaxed posture but she doesn’t say anything else. Chiyo smiles sardonic. “So, any principal suspects?”

“No.” Beverly answers, equally unaffected by Will’s attitude as the other two men in the room. “He is too clean to leave evidence and the suspects that we interviewed had good alibis. We have been looking in hospitals or mortgages for any worker who might have an irregularity on their schedules that could coincide with the times of disappearances and the times of displaying.”

“And whose irregularities go over six years before.” Jimmy adds with a smile as he looks at Brian walking to Will with another bunch of folders on his hands.

“Killing looks more like his job and saving lives is just a hobby. Jack told us what you said about this not being his first kill, and as we investigated we found these.”

Will opens one of the old manila folder that he hasn’t seen in years.

“The hair used in Galatea was bleached but we were able to extract DNA from it, and you wouldn’t guess from who it is!”

“Haley Parks.” Beverly says before the two men can speak, they sigh with annoyance. She smiles victorious. “Disappeared five years ago, never found. Part of the investigation done to the mysterious kidnappings done by The Ghost. The hair is the only remain we have from her.”

“Aw, I wanted to say that...” Brian grimaces before continuing. “We kept investigating the other hairs, all from other victims of The Ghost. The hardest part was the pillow from the Kiss. The ones that we could process have a compatibility with the other victims, it's been hard but we have an approximate of 32 corpses. All genders include.”

Will looks at Chiyo, she is staring at the pictures of her victims, satisfied with her work and the exposure of her legacy.

“I thought the case of The Ghost was being treated as terrorism. Organized crime.” Will rolls his bracelet around his wrist absently.

“Well, it never really fit with the profile for organized crime. They’re not precisely discreet when they work, and there was no proof of gang members working who could be considered

suspicious of working in a band with similarities to the Ghost's M. O." The two other men nod as Beverly speaks. "With this, now we know that it was all done by the same person."

"You really caught a crazy one, Will." Brian jokes.

"Don't listen to him." Jimmy opens a folder on a screen where everyone can see the information. "Better take a look at these."

He can feel her pleasure rushing on his veins like hot water warming his flesh; it leaves him shivering under its touch, he has to close his eyes to enjoy the ride and hide away her emotions before he dares to look at the screen where they are projecting the names and pictures of those who died under her fingers.

Most of the victims are minorities, as always, people easy to lure with money and fake promises. People no one would bother to look for because they weren't important, or young people with complicated backgrounds that made them easy prey for someone with power like Chiyo. Others are the type of people police looks up first, people whose disappearance would have made noise in their communities for the simple fact of being «important» under the system's eyes. Their demography, however, is big, with no discrimination whatsoever to the ones they needed for their goals.

Some familiar faces appear and disappear on the screen, followed by the memories of the final products done with their bodies that are only shown on Will's mind. Where Will sees people, Chiyo sees bags, accessories, ornaments, food, products… and that only leads him to see their portraits after their deaths; holes perforating critical sites, and cords and boxes keeping their limbs on place so they could be perfectly posed.

"Is he using his past victims to complete his new tableaus?" The young profiler asks Will lowly.

"They aren't his... he is only honoring her using the things she couldn't use before she was gone." It comes out of nowhere, against himself and his good judgment. He lets it go anyway.

"Her?" The four of them ask in unison.

"Tsubame. She is the only one that didn't had anything from someone else on her, right?" Brian nods. Short and slow. "She was The Ghost. They were close, of course he would know where to find her tools. She never showed what she did with the bodies, so now he believes that it is time to let everyone know who she was."

"Will, there are hundreds of victims. All that work done by her own seems impossible." Brian says after taking seat next to Clarice. They both look at him as if a second head just grew from his neck.

"If he knows other killers then he might have helped them too." Beverly states behind Will, her presence startles him for a moment.

"Just to chase the victims down. Disappearing them was her own thing." Will tells her. "She was young, she was pretty, she was smart. Luring them to her wouldn't be difficult for

someone like her.”

“What did she do with the bodies?”

“I don't know...” He lies. “But she must had a place to do it. Somewhere where she could disappear them.”

Beverly starts the searching for any places under Chiyo’s–Tsubame’s–name. Meanwhile the other two men get stuck in a conversation that Will doesn’t pay attention to. He is too absorbed looking at the people on the screen, recognizing their similarities and differences just to see what made them so special or despicable for Chiyo. When he can’t find anything interesting about them he returns to look at the tabloids on TattleCrime to update his investigation (in case he has delivered her now).

A bestial snort attracts his attention.

Will can see its head peaking behind a wall, scared of showing itself. No, scare is an incorrect word, its cautious. Its black eyes stare at him with the idea of consumption, a void Will recognized in Chiyo’s eyes and on the warehouse’s obscurity, they want to swallow him up. But it won’t move until Will is ready to recognize it, see it; Will is not ready to ride it and if he gets close there is a big chance that he will end up stabbing the animal.

The man nods at the animal. Wait for him.

Sleeping on the back seat of Beverly’s car is one of the greatest pleasures life can provide.

Artificial gardenias dance in the air, a product of a candle she leaves in the car to melt. The pillow under his head smells like lavender detergent, and the AC is always in the perfect place to be refreshing without being too cold so he can sleep calmly. Music is nice and perfect, different genres made for them to sing or to fill the silence that rules after a traumatic case. When music isn’t there, there are voices.

She likes podcast and audio books, and he likes hearing her laugh when they say something funny, and when she is about to cry, they have to change places so she can mourn properly. He has cried twice with her, a lot of emotions and an incredibly sad book that got them sitting on the trunk with a beer that they couldn't finish.

Beverly never drives fast when he is on the back so he can enjoy the trip, fearless of falling due to an accident. Sometimes she even opens the sunroof when night arrives and they have to travel far away, in those nights she hums and doesn’t sing, if he is awake he will hum along.

Today the sunroof is open and he is watching the sky painted in its yellows and pinks lights, silence rules in the car often interrupted by Beverly hums of agreement when she gets to a conclusion of any conversation she is having on her mind. Will is incapable of sleeping, his eyes refuse to close no matter how many times he tries. In the end, he gave up trying, but he is too comfortable in the back to even sit properly and let Beverly know that he is awake. She

will talk about what happened in the morning, about his decision of coming into the field again, and he... he will enjoy every piece of peace that he can find in that precious Subaru.

Chiyo appears every now and then on the corner of his eye sitting on the front seat, but when he turns to see her, she is already gone. If it were possible to talk with her, he would ask about the stag and the cabin, her past and him, but he has to conform with seeing her very day in complete silence. Chiyo is just a remainder and a warning, not a ghost that he can control, and the stag… it is taking more shape on his mind. Soon, he knows, it won't be a stag but a man, (if he can be called a man).

The city buildings change for trees. Obscurity finally takes over the sky and the first stars appear next to the moon, Beverly reduces the speed and reads a message on her phone, Will copies the action to see the hour and any messages that Alana might have wrote but he finds none. By this hour she must be at home already or maybe in the other corner of the country without his knowledge. Is fine if she is, he is not planning on sleeping much tonight.

A waxing crescent moon full of wry and sly smiles to him from above. It looks amused with his problems as if it were reading his thought, Will doubts it can but somehow it now looks possible. She has been watching him closely when he leaves his house and goes to Somerville, she knows about the letters and the bags, yet she doesn't seem mad about it. Monster and moon are having fun with Will's life and he is ready to let it happen if that means ending him.

It's been ninety-three hours since he was in Somerville.

Seventy-two hours with his mind blank at any moment he tries to think about his answer.

Four hours since he knew about the cabin location.

He doesn't want to go there yet. As much as he wants to know more about Chiyo to catch him, Will is still very much scared of being inside his mind completely; personal spaces always lead to more intense emotions and obsessions that pierce through his flesh and travel to his brain like a larva cyst infecting his organism. That is the best way to describe him, a parasite in Will's life causing epilepsy, memory lost and soon, death. Someday the larva will die with him, but until then he needs to focus on the thing that matters the most: Alana.

Beverly disagreed when he told her to keep his new job a secret, however she won't say anything until he is ready or until he doesn't have any salvation.

The car finally stops but he doesn't go out. Beverly turns to see him finding his sight lost in the sunroof.

"I thought you were divorcing." She finally says.

"I don't want to talk about it." His voice comes out raspy.

"We don't have to talk about anything you don't want to."

"Good."

Neither of them moves. Beverly starts a conversation with someone on her phone, Will rolls to his side and sighs. Beverly finally leaves her phone and turns to see him again.

“Want me to take you to the cabin tomorrow?”

He doesn’t even want to be at the cabin tomorrow. If it is the one mentioned on the letter then it might as well be a place too close to him and that is something for which he isn’t ready. It will all be better if he follows the same rout he always followed before, taking his time to digest the world around him and the feelings of every murderer. But time is running and he needs to work fast before he disappears again or forever, so going into Chiyo’s things is the best option he has now before he dares to open the backdoor in Somerville.

“No. I’ll drive there. Just send the location.”

“Sure.” She stares at him in silence before talking again. “You know that we are at Wolf Trap, right?”

He turns to see her. “I do.”

“I need to go home, Will.”

“I know.”

Every muscle on his body hurts when he stands up. Even opening the door feels heavy and difficult for his malnourished body. The smell of pines and wet soil welcomes him into his home, yet he feels the need to go inside again into the smell of gardenias and lavender. The sound of a window rolling down makes him turn to see Beverly leaning on the copilot seat to talk to him.

“If she throws your stuff you can go to my house. The key is under the carpet.”

“Can’t you open for me?”

“Can’t. I won’t be sleeping there tonight.” The movement of her brows shows the double meaning of her words. Will laughs. “Are you sure is wise to come back?”

Will sees the lights on in his house, the dogs standing on the window watching him and the barn behind his house. Everything is still there as he left it in the morning, and everything will be there when–if–he leaves. He still nods calmly and sure of his decision.

“If I don’t do it then no one will.”

She looks at him unconvinced of his words but ends up shrugging as it is unimportant.

Arriving home feels like a blessing and a disgrace. For once confronting Alana is bad as having to confront serial killers. She has an ability to know exactly what is wrong with him, and he–with no doubt–smells like death. After Beverly leaves him on his property he watches her go, still refusing the conversation that he is about to have with his wife.

Alana is already at home and surely peaking from the window to know his next movement, but of course, she is not, and he is just feeling anxious because facing her will mean the end of his returning to the place where he needs to be.

You won't catch him if you don't look at him. Chiyo told him once with a voice that wasn't her. More a thought of his own than an actual statement made by her. You need to be there with his gifts.

And, alright, it is a bad idea because the connection between them is too profound and he is a drug Will loves and hates to consume but she was right that time. The smell of putrid and rancid is necessary if he wants to have him where he belongs.

And what place is that one, Will? Chiyo asks before he takes the nerve to go into his house.

Alana looks up from the papers spread on the coffee table, her eyes are red with irritation and the scowl on her forehead doesn't go away when she sees him coming in. Will feels the need to run and hide until she isn't mad anymore.

Her frown, however, doesn't last long. With a smile tender as her greeting she welcomes him in. "I expected you to arrive later."

"I promised dinner." He closes the distance between them and plants a kiss on her lips. Short. Fragile. Fake.

"Where is Beverly?"

"Going home. She is leaving early tomorrow for a case." He sits by her side, focusing on her documents rather than her.

"You don't mean we?"

He looks at her with an eyebrow arched. He remains silent.

"You are going back in the field, aren't you? Help them catch The Artist–"

"He isn't The Artist." Will interrupts her. "He is his own persona, but he is not the monster I created."

Alana's face changes to something comprehensive, agreeing with his words. "Of course he isn't, darling, you didn't make him, he just happens to exist."

Will never gave him the order to kill, he is not responsible of him being a bastard no matter how much he loves him. Love is supposed to build, not to destroy.

He doesn't deserve the name of what Will created. And he knows it even if it is for the wrong reason.

"But you are going back."

Will sighs. “Contract says that I have completely prohibited helping in other cases. His only. And I have a strict hour of service or else they’ll put Jack on suspension for «abusing me». They also wanted me to take mandatory therapy.”

But he said no. And they, of course, said that there weren’t many options for him.

Alana chuckles happily. “How did Jack take it?”

“He wasn’t happy but he didn’t object.” Will holds her hand and looks her in the eyes; build trust and win her heart, don’t worry her. “He said that he is happy that I finally find some sense. But truly I just don’t want anything bad happening to you.”

“And what about you? What if something bad happens to you?”

He thinks it thoroughly before answering. “Then I won’t stop you from leaving me. I never wanted to be burden for you, and you don’t have to deal with me your whole life. You deserve to be happy, Alana. If I can’t give you that happiness, then leave.”

The deception on her face tells him that that wasn’t the answer she wanted to hear, but it is the one she needed to hear. It is all she has been denying herself in order to help him, to make him better.

But you don’t need to get better. You are already better.

He looks at the necklace around her neck, the small pink pendant shines softly with the light of the room and the fine gold line caressing her skin is tempting him to touch every place it touches. Will takes the trinket in hand to observe the rock it holds and the peculiarity of the white lines appearing like veins over its surface. It’s pretty, like her. It is a rock small as the nail of his thump, baby pink, it is pretty in her.

“You will let him ruin you, Will.” Alana holds his face softly so he looks at her and leans into the touch to feel it more firmly against his cheek. “All those monsters you caught, all those stories you gave a happy ending… they are nothing compared to who he is and the damage that he can provoke. I can’t help but wish you weren’t back.”

‘Back where? The warehouse? The FBI? Home?’

“Wishing and hoping.” He gives her a stretched smile; his voice is almost a murmur when he speaks again. “I’m not asking you to look with me. I’m just asking you to trust me. This is not only about the people around me, is also about the people he murders. I can’t just sit here and wait for everything to be over, can’t wait to see the police closing it. I already saw him, Alana. He won’t stop until I stop him or until I’m damaged.”

Alana doesn’t say anything else; she takes her time to evaluate him and his words, searching for every lie that could come out of his mouth but incapable of finding something. She gives up after a while. Her hand leaves Will’s face to find place over their intertwine hands.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“I wanted to keep it secret until I knew how to tell you.”

“Right. So once you are on the pit drowning on your own disgrace, we run and help you. No, let me rephrase that: we run and save you.”

“I already told you I don’t need you to save me. The door is open for you to–”

“Don’t even say it, Will! I’m your wife, remember? I deserve an ounce of the respect you can’t give to others.” Alana looks for his eyes but he is avoidant. She gives up. “Saving you is not what bothers me. You are always throwing yourself in front of others to catch bullets without caring about us. This is how it is supposed to be, Will. In sickness and in health.”

“I’m not sick.” He says defensively.

“You are borderline sick.”

Will frowns, her words feel like an offense that crawls on his stomach. He can feel Chiyo’s anger building like molasses sticking on his throat because, for her, sick is a strong, wrong word that doesn’t describe Will at all. For her–for Will–to name him sick, is naming her sick.

He stands up to walk around the living room letting the tension leave his body, his fingers drumming on his thighs to calm the tickling feeling of crushing something under his hands until all is left is a non-heterogeneous mass of anything. What infuriates him the most isn’t the fact that Alana isn’t wrong, but the fact that he tends to follow her worries like self-fulfilled prophesies; his thoughts, as different as they might be from his actions, are walking towards a light that would put his imagination on the table. He’ll cross the border again to give a beast dead and to give his wife life.

What will be left for you?

“Are you afraid of me?” The questions sound peaceful and apologetic, hiding all need of him to put on a fight with the wrong person. Will turns to face her, but his sight is glued to the floor like a scolded kid.

“Sorry?”

“Are-you-afraid-of-me?” He repeats marking word by word. “Because sometimes I have the feeling you are just expecting me to kill you in your sleep, and that grosses me out, Alana. And nothing you do to help me will work if you are afraid of me.”

“What are you talking about? Is not you who scares me, is him.”

“And by definition, it is still me who is the problem because I don't know how to say no when they start living in my mind.” He murmurs. Alana listens but ignores it.

“I’m worried about you and what will be about you if you cross that line of not returning.”

“I already crossed that line.” Their eyes connect so Will can show the sincerity of his words. “I crossed it, and I came back, and I’m still here, and I’m still your husband. Why can’t you trust me with my decisions?”

Will pinches the skin on his wrist to remind himself to stop being so defensive.

Neither of them says anything else. Alana doesn't know how to answer without stating that she is, in fact, afraid of who he becomes and who he will be. 'He is in love with you.' She wants to tell him. 'And you hate him. Love and hate are as dangerous as any other weapon. And is quite difficult to decipher which one you are truly feeling.'

Will returns to sit by her side, calmer than before. Both of them exhale in unison to show each other that they aren't a threat.

"I know that is hard to believe when I say that I have it under my control because the fact is that I don't. I'm doing everything on my power to return home and to return to you. I can't just live with the fear of someone taking everything away from me just because they can." Will takes her hands between his like she did with him. "I need you to comprehend that I can't think of any other way to keep you save. I don't want someone hurting you, I don't want to hurt you. So please just stay by my side. As long as you remind me how to be human again, then I don't have anything to fear." In a lower tone, he adds: "Now, can we please have dinner? Forget that I am who I am and pretend that we are back home from our mediocre jobs to our ordinary life? Can we do that?"

Alana considers the offer. Her nod shows that she is not totally convinced that she can pretend Will isn't Will or that she isn't herself, but eager to pretend for the pleasure of pretending. Will stands after kissing her forehead and walks to the kitchen just before hearing Alana say:

"How does it felt having him back in?"

He stops abruptly, and the movement of Chiyo shuddering with the pleasure it gives her to remember the murder makes him shudder. Something deep inside him blooms like a Morning Glory that brings with it pride and rage impregnated on its petals, only to be shadowed by fear of being him again. In his own house, nevertheless. The flower dies immediately.

Will turns back to face her, she has her sight lost in the wood floor.

"No... no, no, no, no. I'm not playing that game. I'm not telling you because you don't want to know and I don't want to revive it." Chiyo purses her lips, disappointed. "Now, can I please have dinner with my wife so I can go to sleep because tomorrow I have to be in a place where I am not supposed to be?"

The question goes to both women, but only Alana smiles in agreement. It is a sad and stretched motion easy to read. He stretches his hand for her to hold it, and on that same gesture, a pact is sealed between them.

She won't ask. He won't become.

Dinner goes more calmly, with Alana praising his cooking abilities and his new recipe courtesy of someone who shouldn't be named and shouldn't exist. She tries to make it look as if she is eating what her loving husband gives her and he tries to comprehend a beast with culinary skills that surpasses Will's abilities.

After it, they go to bed. Only that Will is the one not sleeping much that night, first he has to make sure that she is profoundly asleep and then he has to walk to his studio in complete silence. When he is there, he counts to ten to see if she follows him, and when he is sure she isn't near, he sits in front of his desk. Paper and pencil go out of the cabinets, and he waits for the questions he asked all along to come into his head.

It isn't as easy as it seems, making him tear every sheet of paper he uses and that contain the words he isn’t really asking. Time goes by with him sitting in complete silence with nothing but white noise playing on repeat on his mind, a complete state of dissociation he got to achieve when he is out of ideas for his books or his profiles.

Chiyo appears on the chest, hitting her heal against its front side to catch Will attention. They stare at each other, fighting to understand a mind that looks similar yet is different from all its angles. It is useless, Chiyo tells him, to try to look inside a mind that is rejected by its owner. The comprehension and rejection of his mind are only divided by one question: who does he want to be?

And Will finally has something to write down.

Chapter End Notes

I have never felt that Alana could truly love Will. I feel that her perspective of love towards him is borderline motherly, and is totally impulses by her own savior complexes (even if these aren't as prominent).
I do love her though, she deserves to be happy. I'll do my best to give it to her. First, they both have to grow out of their dependence for the other.

Her Love

Chapter Summary

Margot and Alana...

Chapter Notes

MY INTERNET WENT AWAY JUST WHEN I WAS READY TO POST?!??!!!? THAT FEELS PHOBIC.

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I think that I will stop coming for some time.” She says out of nowhere, breaking the comfortable silence that they created.

Most of the time they will be speaking a lot, laughing and gossiping about people. But sometimes is rather nice to just focus on Alana’s respiration and the way her eyes move over the pages of the new book on her hands. To Margot, there is nothing in this world worthy of her attention if it isn’t Alana. Only Alana.

“Why is that?” If she is worried, she doesn’t show it. Not until she knows what is going on.

During the time her brother was alive, Margot developed a good survival mechanism that she still uses most of the time when Alana isn’t around. She is the only person with whom she can be authentic and feel relaxed enough to not use said mechanism, but it is in moments like this that she finds it more suitable than confronting reality bared naked. This tactic received the name of the «doll face»; she shows no emotions, no life… just a proper porcelain face with big glistening eyes made to survive.

“The Artist’s Copycat. I think Will is going into solving crimes again. It be better if I stay with him.”

Alana on the other hand, isn’t good at hiding her emotions. But she is a good therapist, and that is the exact posture she is uses every time she speaks about Will.

It amuses her to hear the change of voice that Alana can create from one instant to another with only the mention of his name. Sometimes she feels bad listening about their relationship,

as if she was listening to the personal problems of a patient that she isn't supposed to know. It is all ethically wrong to her.

The soft, reassuring, doll smile on Margot's face disappears. She is left with nothing but a hollow expression that is suddenly full of concern.

"Did something happen to him?" In reality, it doesn't really matter. But Alana likes him, and she pretends to like him in return.

"No. He is doing fine but... is his job. He created the character. And judging how he is, he won't be satisfied until he meets *him*."

"Isn't it dangerous?" *'Won't he become dangerous?'*, is left unsaid. "I mean, to be in the spotlight with him? The killer could take it against you because you are his wi–"

"Don't!" Alana finally raises her gaze from her book, the tone on her voice is a big warning.

"Because you are close to him." Margot corrects herself. "I'm just worried someone will hurt you, love."

Sadness. Alana isn't really good at hiding her sadness, not when she is in front of Margot. She has never been good at it, and to be the one making her aware of all those emotions makes Margot worried. She doesn't want to hurt Alana, she could never do that to her, but sometimes she lacks the tact to say things that can recomfort her. She only hopes Alana will come into her arms and cry, maybe they can cry together, they will kiss, they'll say sorry and they'll stay together.

Maybe after that, Alana won't be going home.

"I have to be with him. He is fragile, unstable. I'm the only person who truly knows him."

"But what about Beverly? She is his friend."

"Beverly is working on the case. She will look for him for answers. She'll drag him in."

"Then let him in." Margot says in such uncaring note that Alana ends up frowning. As cute as it is, she doesn't want to fight with Alana. "My dear, all I say is that you don't have to be the only one carrying this bag. Will isn't alone, and he is an adult. He will be fine by himself."

"He won't. Last time he worked on a case, someone died. And he enjoys it! How could I live knowing that I am responsible for him becoming a murderer because I didn't see the signs?" She is getting exasperated. Margot stands kneeling between her thighs and hugs her torso.

She smells delicious. If she could be small and find a comfortable place against Alana's skin as her personal pet, then she would be happy. She could sleep on the deep pool that forms in her clavicles, braid her hair like a fairy and whisper sweet nothings in her ears while Alana tries to concentrate on something important just to watch her blush.

But that is a daydream for another day.

“I killed my brother and enjoyed it. Does that make me a murderer?” She asks softly.

“Is different.” Alana says. She is on the border of tears.

“How is it different?”

“Will won’t stop.”

“So let him be. Police will deal with him one way or another, it doesn’t matter. But I care for you and your safety. If he does become a murderer I would prefer you to be somewhere safe like here. Here he won’t touch you. He won’t damage you.”

He won’t stain the petals that bloom on her lips, he won’t rot the peaches that hang on her cheekbones, he won’t cut the wings of the butterflies that rest on her eyelids, he won’t contaminate her perfect existence with his putrid mood.

He won’t take her away from Margot.

“Is not that easy!” Alana stands up abruptly making Margot fall in her ass. She looks up at her in shock. “I can prevent it from happening!”

“You are not his therapist, Alana.” She tries to contain her own frustration.

“But I am his wife!”

Margot stands to look at her with a dubious stare, but all she sees is anger in pure form sneaking out of Alana’s eyes, not at Margot, but at herself. She feels incompetent, strange.

She is leaving for good. Because of her own convictions.

Brave girl, how Margot would love for her to be blind and not brave.

“You don’t even love him.” Her words come out of her mouth with a ghost-light weight.

Alana hears them anyway. “But he loves me. And if I can use that to save him, then I will.”

“So you are going home to play house? To pretend you are happily married to a man who you haven’t kissed in years? I am sorry for telling you this, but we both know he is a lost case. He is suicidal, and if he doesn’t put the gun against his head, someone will. And I would prefer it if it isn’t you.”

She wants Alana to stop for a moment and reconsider her words. To joke about how this isn’t passing the Bechdel test like she always does when they talk about their favorite authors or when they talk shit about the assholes who approach them when they go out on dates. She wants Alana to find some sense into her words because what she is doing is suicidal.

“I am married.”

“YOU ARE THOWING AWAY ALL OF THIS BECAUSE OF A STUPID MAN-CHILD?”

“HE IS MY HUSBAND.”

“I AM YOUR WIFE!” Margot says it so desperately that even she is surprised by her words.

Alana looks at her startled, but she doesn't say anything. Instead, she lowers her gaze and stares at the floor. Margot is breathing heavily, ready to run behind Alana and stop her from going home to a monster. Her hands are shaking and she can feel the sting of the tears forming on her eyelids, ready to fall at any given moment. She will fight them.

“We are going to wake up the baby if we keep screaming.”

The baby is a hundreds of rooms away from them. Margot couldn’t care less about the baby because she knows the baby is safe, but Alana? When will be the last time she sees her?

Still, to stop her is stupid. She isn’t ready to let Will go and firm the divorce papers that he has hidden on his studio *(Margot discovered them once, when she was helping Alana because she couldn’t find the veterinary card of one of her dogs. She didn’t had the force to tell her, because she knew that it didn’t corresponded her, but for once, she was happy with Will Graham)*. Nevertheless, Alana will go to his house at the end of the day no matter what, because that is still her house too. She can only convince her to stay in contact, offer her a place to stay if anything happens.

Love her unconditionally despite what she chooses and save her from anything.

“You don’t have to stop coming.” She lowers her gaze too. Her own tears rolling down her cheeks to wet the carpet. Traitors. All of them. Her parents. Her tears. Her love. Her heart. *Her Alana.* “This will always be your home.”

Alana holds her cheek on her hand, forcing Margot to look at her. A sad smile appears on her lover’s mouth and she can’t think of anything but kissing her so she can change her mind. She stays still.

“I am rejecting you, Margot.” The kiss that Alana plants on her lips feels like venom that slowly poisons and melts her until she becomes an unrecognizable mass of black matter floating in the infinite space. “I need to focus on my own monster.”

She says nothing because she is too deep in her own misery that all her senses had turn off. When she finally comes back into her right mind, all she can see is Frankenstein walking out the door really to chase down her creation.

Chapter End Notes

It is short... don't let me write wlw while I listen to Hozier.
I wish it could be longer, but somehow I feel that is for the best if it remains small.

I love them so much, I want them to be happy. I'll work hard in their next chapter.

I also want to thank the people who leaves kudos, and the people who read my story in general. I appreciate that. I'll do my best to get better and better and better <3
Thank you thank you thank you thank you *kisses your cheeks in the most tender and polite way possible*

Cordyceps

Chapter Summary

Abigail, Chiyo, Will.

Chapter Notes

I don't have much to say for this one. Sorry for taking too long, but here is a new chapter.

I hope yall having a great time. Kisses.

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My dad is the best.

Truly, the best.

He is never mad, and even when he is, you won't know.

He is so nice that he is always surrounded by people in galas and parties.

He is popular on his practice because he is excellent at it. Sometimes, he used to reschedule all his appointments just to spend a day with me or to see my ballet shows.

He is smart. He knows a lot of things about the world and its history that always amuse me. When we travel, he is the one telling me stories about the places we visit. Everyone loves it when he talks about Dante, Dostoyevsky, Monet, or Klimt. One might feel smart just standing by his side.

My dad has a type of powerful personality that has everyone standing in line to not bother him. My friend, Nora, says that his aura is something dark and dangerous but I think she is wrong. He just commands so much respect and authority you have to be stupid to even doubt his words.

Many would say that because of him always making my whims true I grew up to be a brainless brat who always gets what she wants, and the truth is that they aren't entirely wrong. I'm not a stupid brat, but I do get everything I want. My dad always taught me to take it because I deserve it, he taught me that swine deserves less than gratitude.

I make him proud for following his rules perfectly. He always says so.

I am his favorite child since I'm the only child he has.

But my dad hasn't been the same in a long time.

I think that me leaving home made him sad, but I was serious when I said I wanted to go to France and we are too much alike for him to prohibit it. (Aunt Chiyo always said that some beasts are better uncaged).

He doesn't host his dinner galas anymore, and he spends more time on his office than in the opera. Aunt Chiyo says that he doesn't hunt with her anymore because her project is finished and because he doesn't find any pleasure in doing it anymore. He eats, but he doesn't get nourishment from it; he cooks, but he doesn't create art; he sleeps, but he doesn't rest.

One night before I graduated, I found him on the kitchen, sitting on the counter with his sight lost in the window and the blue light of the moon coming in. He, too, was covered by it. My dad looked like a ghost or a vampire broken by the passage of time, condemned to wander its house for eternity. He looked alone despite me being there.

So I tried to find something to cheer him up. Art, movies, opera, music, books...

That's when we found you. You write with the precise exactitude of a person who has seen and smelled everything. My dad isn't the type of person who reads modern fiction; he likes medical investigations, psychiatric research, literature (really old literature), and «master pieces made to be conserved for eternity».

I grew up with real stories and old fiction made by broken souls or conflicted minds.

But my dad read you twice one night, rambling over the ideas you portrait and the designs you created.

You reminded him of his youth in Florence and the canvas he painted himself. You gave him inspiration and amusement. But it wasn't enough.

Nothing could be enough for a glutton like my dad.

He could eat and eat and eat but never be satisfied.

What you did to him was ephemeral, something that he sometimes enjoys to remember just to fall into disgrace again and again. After all, every time he ended your books, he was laden by the fact that he was still alone.

I guess I still have to thank you, though. Sometimes, I catch him with a soft smile on his lips when he is on his mind palace. I suspect he is reading you again when he is in there, imagining himself creating the murals you described. There aren't many places on his mind palace that can bring him that genuine happiness, so it might as well be you.

I fear that I might lose him.

I've always known that I am not enough to keep him in this world, and I've accepted it. But if I don't have Aunt Chiyo nor my dad, then I fear that I might become his loneliness instead of his pride.

What to do? What to do? What to do?

⁂

It isn't the same cabin.

In fact, it isn't even close to what the drawings portrayed.

The one on the drawings is a two floor cabin painted in cream with its windows white and a triangular ceiling painted in sage. It is in a place uncovered by trees and it has a path with easy access for cars and people.

This is one is a rustic building hidden behind vegetation and pines, down a cliff that the SUVs and other cars can't access. This one is a small cabin with only one floor and an irregular ceiling–one side larger than the other–covered in moss and plants. Its windows are covered with black trash bags, while the entrance to the basement is covered by a sailcloth to keep water from damaging it.

If it weren't a possible crime scene, Will would have found it cozy and pretty, like the type of cabin drawn on children's fairytales. But this is no fairytale and he is no creature looking for a warm place to spend the night; this is Chiyo's cabin and it is a nightmare made to fool people into believing that it is safe.

And the plan is still on board, of course. And Chiyo doesn't stop being annoyingly mysterious.

A part of him was hoping to see the real thing and not the fake copy of her butchering place, to know something more about her that could help him reach <u>him</u>. Instead, he is in the middle of nowhere, trying to catch a killer that is already dead, while a killer that is very much alive keeps an eye on him.

This cabin feels like a distraction to him. A trap that he is forced to see now that he revealed Chiyo's true identity–or at least half of it.

Will is the first to go down the hill without hiding his anxious need to see everything that could belong to the damsel in green. Trap or not, it was still hers. And Chiyo is still <u>his</u>.

He walks around the place slowly as he checks for a broken window or an imperfection that can tell him if the place has been ruined by animals or people hiking nearby, but the cabin is perfect. Ready to receive its next owner for the duration of their vacation.

The forensic team is the one opening the door, and a stag welcomes him in. The vision is an instant, black as molasses and imposing like the evil spirit it is. When it goes, all that is left is the wall on the back and the two antlers over the back door.

There are two tables inside, both close to the window on the left of the room. On the adjacent side are a couple of buckets of different sizes and different cleaning products. Over a table close to the backdoor are a bunch of sheets, a futon, and a pillow piled up like she just left the place and was planning on returning back.

Will feels chills just being there. Entering into her sanctuary–if this one is the real thing–is too personal and a kind of closeness that has him wishing to close his eyes and pretend he is not there. As if doing so, it is as respectful as looking to the other side while she stands naked in front of him.

Beverly appears by his side. Her hair is tied in a low ponytail. She is wearing her gloves and masks already. Jimmy and Brian are on his other side, wearing the same protection as Beverly.

“What are we looking for, boss?” She asks mockingly.

“Any evidence of human remains used on here. Leather, fillers, glue, soap... anything, really.” He answers with his eyes lost in the antlers. “Look for remains in a hundred feet radius.”

“We already did that the first time we were here.” Jimmy tells him as he watches Beverly walking towards some people on the forensic team. “We only found animals.”

“Then dig deeper. Animals are often used to hide something else. Break the concrete on the basement and pull every plank of the floor. Do the same on her house, in her job, in everything she sold or gifted to her friends or colleagues.”

“You really convinced that she was a murderer, aren't you?” Brian’s voice is barely a murmur on his ear, yet Will nods confidently. “It will be hard to get any DNA from anything we find, but we can try. By the way, I think you would rather see the basement. Most of her stuff is down there.”

Will nods absently and the two men leave him alone. He walks out through the back door, directly to the forest as if looking for anything out of place that he hasn’t seen before despite it being his first time there. The forest isn’t too different from the one in his property, and still, it seems to be an alien world unexplored by human life. He walks for a while, watching every rock, every tree and every branch on the ground, memorizing scratches on the logs and holes dug on the ground.

Every sound coming from his companions is lost in the distance until there aren’t more sounds apart from those common of the woods. Birds chirping, mouse running, insects flying. This is his natural habitat, but it is also hers. Will watches around to see if someone is spying or if someone followed, but thankfully he is alone and lost. If they are looking for him, he can’t listen to Jack’s shouts or Beverly’s whistles.

There is only him, nature and complete peace.

The place where he is standing is perfect to see everything going on around him. The cabin is in an elevated place from where he can’t be seen unless someone knows where to look at, and the rest of the land stays in the same level to be–relatively–easy to walk.

Will looks around once more. And he closes his eyes.

The burning pendulum swings from side to side while his body feels like floating over the surface of the ocean. Water comes into his ears and nose as it slowly swallows him in. It takes him a while to get use to the cold sensation of the liquid wetting his body and filling up his lungs and intestines, and it takes him another moment to get used to appearance of the depts of the ocean before him. He stays in that part of his unconscious while he decides what is the meaning of his actions and where does he want to–

Shoot–

The air has a lingering smell of burning gunpowder and metal, and all the animals standing in a fifty feet radius start a race away from the place where sound came from. They wouldn't want to have the same destiny as the animal he is chasing.

He failed.

He sometimes fails and it is more for his own amusement than for the mercy he might have for his prey. The tree where the bullet penetrated is young so the bullet stays in it rather than coming out from the other side, it will leave a scar for sure but it won't be noticeable in a while. It won't leave any evidence.

A snarl is heard far away from where he stands, taking him back to the main focus of his labor. Will puts the shotgun on his back and begins his race towards the source of the sound. Not far away from where he was, begins a trait of blood that he takes to his advantage. Whatever is bleeding, is bleeding a lot, and it won't take too long until it starts feeling sleepy and tired.

Sweat sticks his shirt to his back uncomfortably and it rolls onto his eyes making them itch but nothing matters at that point. The rush of adrenaline forming in his body invites him to keep on running until his legs sore terribly and the rate of his heart elevates making him deaf of any other sound. This one is a quick one.

The fastest he'd had in a long time. A sudden movement behind some bushes catch his attention and he stops completely to recharge the bullets on the shotgun, he waits and he stares attentively to the prey hiding there. Darkness is falling above them and there isn't much time until everything becomes ideal for it to hide until the next morning. Surely, it doesn't know the land as well as he does but it might have a chance of going out alive or dying somewhere where he can't retrieve its body.

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But it won't be a problem now that they are looking at each other.

Will can see its exorbitant eyes full of terror looking at him from the shadows that the bushes offer it. Irises big because of adrenaline and stained in red due to the hemorrhages. Will

doesn't give in into its emotion as he normally does, but instead, he drowns into them as if they are an elixir made by God's hands. It is intoxicating.

It isn't quite as strong as being him, nothing will ever be like being him.

Strong torrents of excitement make their way to the tip on his finger caressing the trigger.

The man stands up revealing his position and causing a few birds to run away before he begins to run again. Will aims to his leg, is a simple and clean perspective that he can't fail–

"WILL!"

Why is it begging his name?

"WILL!"

He is sure they don't know each other.

"WILLIAM BENEDICT GRAHAM!"

Will opens his eyes, bewildered. There is too much light and there are too many colors shining like candles on the ground. He inhales the oxygen around him giving a fresh contrast to his body heat, and for a moment he swears he can still see the man running behind some trees like a hurt deer.

"Move your ass here before I go to you!"

Four feet behind him is Beverly with a bothered expression on her face that he mimicries. Eyes narrowed and frown deeply marking her forehead.

She doesn't move from the place and neither does Will; with one of her hands she holds a long baton similar to the ones used by the search and rescue teams, the other hand is holding onto the log of a pine near her.

He moves slowly to her; limbs and brain still numb from the abrupt interference to his job but perfectly strong to keep him from falling. Waking up from pleasurable dreams are always the worst since the contact with reality gives away the person he can play to be in the parts of his imagination that doesn't belong entirely to him. But is good to be in reality. In reality he can still see Beverly smiling at him.

It is a small and strained smirk. There is a glimpse of worry showing in her eyes but she won't say anything. It won't work to fight him when he is so persistent on working a case.

"'M not a Benedict." He says softly.

"You're also not deaf. But here we are." She shrugs. "Crawford wants to see you. We found something over half a mile away from the cabin."

"Is that why you have that stick?"

She looks at the baton and then at Will.

“No. It’s because there are a lot of bear traps around here. I don’t want to fall on any of them. I’m still surprise you made it this far without knowing that.”

Will looks around to see every detail with more attention. He can’t see much with a simple inspection but he isn’t exactly waiting for a demonstration either *(although it does help to add more details to his imagination)*. They don’t say much as they walk to the spot, silence has always been well acceptable between them, it leads to a symphony of other sounds that Will can use to distract himself.

Half of the forensic team is already moving down the path to the finding with their tools in hands while the other half remains on the cabin checking for any minor evidence they can find. They parade out of the building like ants going out of a colony to meet their bossy queen and their eminent destruction in hands of a parasitic fungi. Chiyo isn’t the main resource of fungi, but she is the poor soldier infected growing roots all over her body. Unlike other ants that die far from the nest, she will take the fungi to the colony and–fully aware of her own destruction–she will die in the best room and let the spores infect new ants.

Infect more ants.

Liberate more spores.

Infect more ants.

Liberate more spores.

Infect more ants.

Infect more ants.

Infect more ants.

Infect more ants.

Infect more ants.

Infect more ants.

Infect more ants.

End life as it is known.

Chiyo is standing in the entrance of the basement, her long dress is covered with dirt while her hair holds little branches that come out of her head like antlers growing taller and taller. They are branches of a three that Will could never climb even if he wanted. Weapon of an immortal animal that will love to wear his intestines like a crown. Emblem of a love that consumes him violently.

Here in the wild, in her natural habitat, Chiyo is an ancient creature stuck in time feeding herself with the fear of those who are lost in her. She has an air of severity and imposition that he can almost feel as his, so tempting to grab that he has to stop himself from stretching his hand towards her. Her smile is sharp as a knife; she knows that she is winning with only having him near her sanctuary, and soon enough he'll too be infected by him.

Beverly snaps her fingers to keep him moving. He follows–

–like a good boy.

Chiyo whispers.

In Clarice Starling's words: it is a beautiful painting.

In Will Graham's thoughts: *it is* a beautiful painting.

And it is his.

And it is his.

The strokes are blurry in some parts while others hold perfect definition of its shapes. Red, blue, purple, white, yellow; all showing the heart of a heartbroken man and the «love» he can offer. A snake-like branch full of thorns grows around the heart like the crown once put over Jesus Christ head, but unlike His, this one seems to create joy on a heart that grows flowers there where the thorns cut. It bleeds petals and *gold*…

Every color contrasts with the cold gray color of the wall. On the bottom of the heart he can read an inscription done with black charcoal in a perfect calligraphy that Will can easily identify with some sort of pride and nostalgia.

"Here lies the heart of the woman offered to the Sun." Brian reads as loud as he can while some men end up breaking the concrete under the mural. Dust flies everywhere forcing them to wear masks and glasses. "If that isn't clearer as water then I don't know what it is."

Her heart is still on his chest. He looked at it before he went out that morning and the night before.

"Is Agent Graham the Sun?" Clarice asks softly after the loud sounds end. The men are finally done and a four people intervene to take the pieces of concrete away. "Did he really gave you her heart as an offering?"

'Yes. But it isn't here.'

Will shrugs. He is still focused on the epitaph.

"So, we might be talking about someone with magic or religious deliriums. The Sun is taken by many cultures as the personification of good, evil, creation or destruction. Either way, it is

seen as the ruler of life in Earth.” Jimmy says from behind Will as he walks to his friend. He doesn’t turn to see him but he finally snaps out of his mind.

“No. No, he isn’t «magic».” He «looks» at Crawford but his gaze falls on the purple tie around his neck. “Religion and magic are different things, and he might have some closeness to religion and God but it isn’t to the point of doing offerings like this. He doesn’t expect any kind of magical consequence from burring a heart, he is ritualistic but not like *this*.”

He points at the hole being dug by the other agents.

“He *did* murdered and collected organs for the «writer».” Beverly received a nod of agreement from Clarice. “Anyone could think that those were offerings just like burring a heart here.”

“I’m not saying that they aren’t. I’m saying that he isn’t giving magical benefits to the organs. There isn’t a heart *here*.”

“But there are other things.” Brian interrupts.

On the hole is a box. Red, big as a shoe box, closed by a black ribbon, damaged by its time underground. Someone passes the box to Brian and he, sub sequentially, passes it to Jimmy who takes the ribbon away and passes it to Crawford. Both women and the three man lean closer to their boss to see the interior of the box, one of them being more impatient than the others.

To Will it seems that Crawford is taking a long time to fully take the lid from the container, moving inch by inch just to see what kind of volatile reaction it might cause to Will.

The lid goes to Beverly and the interior is finally exposed. A single letter in a velvet burgundy envelope with pastel pink sealing it. The seal is different from the ones he usually receives, and its beauty comes from the azalea drawn on it. Crawford takes it before Will can even raise his hand.

The image of Crawford holding his letter makes his heart skip a beat, it looks like evidence rather than a proper letter given to Will. It also awakens his fear and the need to hide it away from everyone who is around them; they’ll *know* once they read it. He will tell them that Will is part of the problem, he will ruin his own death.

Crawford turns it around before Will can even command his body to move to the ladder that will take him away of his own fall. He closes his eyes slowly and ready to hear the guns loading and aiming towards him, he is ready to die with the letter in hand and stain it with his blood if he can also take Crawford and a few agents to the ground with him. *He is ready to protect his letter.*

But none of that happens. The letter is in front of him once he opens his eyes, it says his name with the same stupid and perfect calligraphy.

‘He writes like a founding father.’

He looks at Crawford with incredulity before he takes the envelope in hand. It slides to his palm in an almost tender caress that has him gasping for air, everyone stares at the exchange while Will reunites the courage to *actually* open it.

He clears his throat before talking. “Does anyone has a knife?”

Three Swiss Army knives appear in front of him from multiple directions that he doesn’t bother to see properly. He takes the one on his right and opens it to cut the border of the envelope.

“Just break the seal, Will.” Beverly insists while she retrieves her knife after he is done.

He doesn’t answer. Better said, he doesn’t exist anymore. A trance-like state flows around him preventing anyone from coming in or out of the bubble until he is done reading, and the sheet of paper is already coming out to the world to see. It is written with a typewriter as the other ones with the exception of the heart drew on the bottom left.

Both mural and drawing show an extreme precision on their anatomical details.

It isn’t a letter like the ones they exchange, but it still holds a beauty that he can’t ignore. He reads:

To my dear Will.

Have you seen the light of the Moon on a winter night?

Many might say that it shines white, others might say that it doesn’t really change, but I would dare to say that it looks like an empty heart. The vessels on its body drained of any blood that once kept it beating and the meat flaccid from the muscles relaxing after fighting a long fight.

This night, Will, I think I may die.

I see the Moon from my kitchen window. It is completely alone. The stars have disappeared from the firmament due to the light of the city consuming their sparkles, and the only light that remains still is this broken heart before me. Is nights like this when I wonder if the Sun is watching over it and if it is conscious of the Moon’s problems.

The Sun, so hated by many. And the Moon, so loved by others. It is ironic to see how one gives life and it is retributed with the angry frowns of those who narrow their eyes because they are incapable of staring into its light while the Moon is appreciated despite being used just by its beauty. I don’t think people really see its importance into this world, and the precious help it gives to life itself. But the Sun knows.

They stare at each other from the distance and someday–if the Moon’s wishes come true–they will coincide with each other in the sky.

Until that happens, the Moon must do sacrifices. Show the Sun all its love.

I will kill her, Will. I saw this day coming a long time ago and I'm afraid it is inevitable. She means a piece of my heart, and a piece of my life that I want to share with you. I'll give her to you, Will, if that brings you closer to me. Because she*... there aren't more reasons to keep her here if she can become a part of you too. It will hurt my soul to see her go, but for you I will open the Earth in two and from that void I will bring every creature from Hell if that means keeping the Lamb of God by my side.*

Everything is ready to go. I'm ready to start war. And until the day we can create the Eclipse that keeps humanity into darkness, I'll give you a piece of my heart to feed yourself. I give you this, Will.

I'll give her to you.

I love you.

He stays silent for an eternity after he is done reading. The blue from his gloves contrasts with the white paper and the dark ink, for a moment that is all he can see since everything around them–him, the letter, Will– is blurred into a dream long forgotten. He isn't sure how many times he re-reads the letter or the way his thumb has been tracing the heart with tender caution, but he is sure that everyone around him is aware of the focus he keeps on it and he needs to stop.

You can't, says Chiyo to them. You can't keep me way from what belongs to me.

Will closes his eyes so hard that he can actually see static and weird shapes turn into an explosion of colors behind his eyelids. His head hurts and the image of a pale heart in formaldehyde comes into his mind.

Sacrifice.

To him she was important like a tag is important to an archer. He can't care about anyone else but himself, he remembers, she was his pupil and the pig on his farm and yet, Will is feeling the love the archers withholds for his arrows. Sometimes even getting blesses for luck when it finally is send away to hit the tag, a symbol of a war won.

The letter leaves his hand against his own will and it takes him a bit to recognize it back into Crawford's fingers. He reads it out loud for everyone to listen to the love confession someone has declared to Will, it makes him mad and sick. Will feels insulted when Crawford's avoids to have his name coming out of his mouth and he is grossed out by the inquisitive glances that his colleagues give him when the last part comes into the world.

"We weren't meant to be here." Clarice says before Will can take the letter away from Crawford's fingers.

"Why is that?" Crawford asks back.

The young woman takes a glance around and then to the mural before her eyes; Will follows her action and they are both left alone with a perfect love confession.

“This isn’t her killing site. This is a tomb. He was trying to bury his love.” She takes the letter surprising her superiors with her libertinage. “This wasn’t even made for the author to read. He is showing too much weakness, fragility. Why would he want to show fragility to the man that can catch him?” She whispers just for the group to hear. “Is like bearing his neck for Will to cut it.”

“Maybe he wants Will to cut it.” Brian suggests.

“Die because of someone he loves? Then why doing all this instead of finding an easy way to provoke him?” Clarice asks back. “By this point he could have already come closer and meet him, find a way to be near him instead of playing mind games with him–”

“He doesn’t want to die.” Will interrupts her, winning the attention of everyone around him. He doesn’t care, he won’t look at them. Not when the letter is so close to his hands again. “But he wants me to kill him. Is not about me feeling the same way he feels about him, is about me becoming similar. He wants to be killed by me, because then he’ll–”

‘He’ll prove us to be the same.’

“–Clarice is right.” He adds at the end when he isn’t able to find more words to define his intentions. “We shouldn’t be here. *I* shouldn’t be here.”

“Why?” Crawford arches his brows.

Will stares into his eyes before speaking: “Because that will ruin the game.”

“This isn’t a game, Will. People are dying because–”

“Say that to him, Jack! This is a game for him you like it or not, it won’t matter how well you play your cards but how much he cheats to win. And you know what? It is fine by me! I will play along all he wants if that keeps me alive because, in case you forgot, this isn’t just about people dying. Is about *me* being in danger.” He explodes finally. The tension comes out of his body in this little outburst of anger.

“You say he won’t hurt you.” Crawford tries not to shout at him but violence is clearly heard on his words.

“I’m still useful. Tsubame was not useful.” ‘*Reborn can also come in the way our bodies are used after our deaths.’* Will frowns as soon as the connection comes into his mind, he slides the gloves out of his hand in a firm movement. “He had to reuse her, make her reborn into something better… something perfect. Like he did to them.” He pauses, trying to make any connection that can explain the change of behavior until there isn’t other reason apart from him lying. “She was rude.”

“To him?” Clarice intervenes. The questions are more for her than for Will to answer. “Did she doubted him?”

“I don’t know… *I actually don’t know.*” He scoffs more loudly than he actually wants to.

“Is there something funny, Graham?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know anything.” Will shrugs. “The game isn’t fair.”

“He is a murderer, Will. How can he be fair?” Beverly asks with incredulity and worry, as if Will is suddenly losing his mind.

He shrugs again, his fingers tapping soundless and senseless melodies in his thigh as he wanders in his mind and his memories. He really is clueless about him. The letters have been nothing but piffle about nothing important; the drawings, gifts and the recipe are distractions to keep him interested in the case until the grand finale comes *(until they can Eclipse the World)*.

“Close Tsubame’s case.” Will looks at Crawford, the stretched smile on his face creates an expression of indignation on his bosses face. “He is distracting us. Whether there is something here or if it isn’t, it won’t help in anything, it will just give him time to plan whatever he wants. Close the case, Jack. Wait for the other body.”

“Will!” Beverly scolds him but he keeps his eyes on Crawford to dare him. “You can’t be serious! Tsubame has victims that deserve justice, she was probably working with him to do it. She is our only connection to him! You can’t just toss her away like that.”

“And you can’t ask us to wait for the other corpse either.” Jimmy states in agreement. “Our job is to avoid them from happening, not waiting for them to *happen*.”

“Well, in Will’s favor the corpse might be out there already.” Brian says. “He works faster than us because Will is right, we *are* taking too much time with Tsubame but she and her victims are already dead. If we want to prevent murders then we have to catch him, otherwise we will never have a real statement that can confirm what Will says.”

Will gives up first. He turns to face the angry expression on Beverly’s face but she avoids making eye contact with him. Like it or not, Brian is right, if they don’t catch him then they will keep adding numbers and Will… not even he knows what will happen to him.

He turns towards the ladder and walks away before Crawford can tell him to stay.

Multiple eyes are on him as he climbs the ladder and exposes his skin to the soft sun piercing through the trees. They wonder, he thinks, what he is doing here after all this time and all his errors. He can’t blame them for not trusting him right away, but they can at least pretend not to know him or the rumors created by Lounds and his little «accidents».

He breathes in the smell of the woods. He engraves the sounds into his mind. He imprints every color into his corneas. The outside of the tomb is warm but weird to him, like a hug from someone unwanted, and it takes everything on his body to separate from the mouth of the devil before it gulps him in again.

He lost.

The game hasn't started yet, and he is already losing.

Unexperienced movements and tactics are a joke to an opponent who has been playing all his life. He has the crown strongly attached to his head, and all he is asking Crawford's peon is to take the seat on his side or to die under the sharp edge of his sword. Destruction is all that awaits on the other side of the board, but at least he will remain alive if he chooses to wear the crown proudly.

He almost chuckles out loud just imagining it when a hand suddenly touches his back. The quick turn makes the young woman jump a step behind in surprise, a spark of repent shows in her eyes before she looks away.

"I am so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you like that, sir."

"Don't worry about it." He assures her. Her posture changes once she recognizes Will isn't mad because of her actions. "Can I help you?"

"Oh, yes. I was wondering if you could help me with my profile for the case, sir. I have been studying it since it began, but I'm not sure about what happened right now." She pauses. Lowly she adds: "Or why you are closing the case."

"I don't think there is much to say about him, Clarice." Will kicks a rock with his feet to keep himself distracted. *If only it was someone's head.* "He is just another white man with medical skills and a big ego."

"Yes, but I was thinking that maybe we can use his weakness against him. The letter he left there was a good thing to understand his mind a bit more. He may not believe in magic but he believes in something sacred, and if that place was part of his sanctuary or part of a tomb, then the letter takes more meaning, don't you think so? Sir?"

"And how do you know that in reality it isn't another distraction?" He faces her, centering in her perfect brows rather than her eyes. "He is a control freak. Even vulnerability is done with a good intention."

"Then what's the meaning of his letter?" Clarice crosses her arms over her chest. The tone of her voice shows that she is getting frustrated with his lack of cooperation.

"What do you think it is?" He answers the same way anyway.

"He is trying to use his words against you." She says firmly without thinking it first. "Your empathy and the fact that everyone here fears you are keys for him to put the FBI against you again. He will alienate you like that."

"So you don't think that this is just another obsessive fan writing letters to his favorite author, that is a good start. Now find the snitch."

"Snitch?" He watches as one of her brows makes a perfect bow.

"Didn't you know that someone told him about me?" Clarice shakes her head. "Then you have something new to start with. Don't profile him. Profile every person who knows about

me being the author, spy on them or something."

"Isn't it responsibility of the BAU to start an investigation on that?"

Will shrugs. "Do you see that anyone here is under investigation? And now thanks to this more people will know about it. With little time and a killer that hunts in a matter of weeks, it is hard to do a proper investigation–"

"Overall now that you are here." Her sentence drills in his mind and he scowls. "Does he want to ruin you or does he want to inculpate you?"

"He wants me to correspond his feelings." He says as calm as he can. "If you really want to help, don't give him too much space into your head. He is another protocol killer and nothing else. There have been a lot more like him before. Give him too much space, and he'll end up using you, too."

"And what about you?" She insists. "Isn't it why you are here? Because you are giving him too much space in your mind? It is amoral to have a victim playing cop in the field, and more if it is someone who has a personal interest with the case."

The frustration he is feeling is every time more evident. Seconds go by, and none of them comes with the wonderful serenity that he has to show to not be cataloged as threatening or «too unstable to be working in the field». They will get him out of the case sooner or later if he gets a little bit mad, and starting a discussion with Crawford wasn't smart nor a good impression to help his case.

He tries to regulate his breathing and his heart rate before talking again.

"If you have a problem with it, put a complaint with Human Resources like the many others who have done it." He gives her his back and walks away. "Or complaint to Jack Crawford, see how it goes."

He makes it to the cabin, stomping all the way there. The palms of his hands feel hot and numb thanks to the pressure he is putting onto his fits, and there is a big possibility that his nails might have left a mark in them that will leave little hematomas.

"Agent Graham!" A shout coming from behind has him sighing in distress. Clarice runs to him and stands in front of him with an imposing posture that reminds him of Crawford. "I wasn't complaining about you being here, I'm sorry if it sounded like that. I was–"

"You are trying to help, Clarice. Helping comes with confrontation. But nothing you say will." He walks pass her. "I won't leave the case."

"I'm not asking you to leave." She starts walking by his side. "I'm asking for a chance to help."

"Ask Crawford for help."

"Crawford isn't you!"

Will stops to face her. Her strength and decision is as ruthless as Crawford's, but she is Will. The girl that helps all the lambs to escape from the slaughter house and carries the guilt of their death when she can't do anything for them.

"Do you think he is attractive?" The question takes her out of place.

"What?"

"Is he attractive?"

"I don't–"

"Just answer, Clarice."

The young woman stays in silence as the scowl in her forehead begins to relax. Will finally stares right into her eyes.

Her sweet and soft factions are a contrast to her strong personality, and the suits she's been wearing ever since Prunell put her out on the field reflect her need to show herself as something better than herself. She is sub estimated in her area for being a woman, for being short and pretty, for being the best. They don't think that her scores are something she has earned with hard work but with her pretty mouth, and all the rumors grew now that she is working for Crawford. Clarice is not only trying to help because she wants to do something good.

She wants to help so everyone can shut up once her bullet is in his head.

So, it is a yes. He is attractive for her for reasons different from the ones Will has in mind, but hers are better reasons than his.

"Yes." She says in a shameful tone. She looks at the soil and the leaves in her feet. "He is interesting. The case is interesting. And if I'm being honest I don't really think this will ever end." She shots a quick glance towards Will and her firm posture comes back. "I think Crawford will die before he gets to see the killer he is trying to catch; he is too centered in saving victims than understanding the killer. That is why he is using you, because you think like them. And that will help *you* catch him. And I want to be there when it happens."

"You say it like I don't care about the vict–"

"You don't." His stance changes to something rigid, ready to fight Clarice right there. In her eyes he can see the truth that he has been avoiding. "At least not in this case. This is not about others dying for you, is about someone *killing* for you. The most merciful thing he can do is to kill you, but he isn't doing it. He is not only fantasizing about the you that he idealized, but he is also planning to consume you. And once he is done with that, you'll be alone in a prison cell."

"I'm his scapegoat." She nods.

"Your position in the game will depend on you only. All you have to do is use his weakness against him." Clarice takes a hand inside her pants pocket to retrieve a paper folded in two.

She hands it to Will. “Is not like you don’t know anything. You just don’t want to know about it.”

The picture is damaged on the corners and the deterioration on its half shows a life of constant folding. Chiyo looks smaller and younger than the Chiyo from his imagination; she has a bright smile in her eyes that forces her eyes to close up under the pressure of her pink cheeks; a brown leather jacket and a purple sweater cover her body from the cold and the snow that gathers around her, her shotgun hangs from her back and in her arms is a little bulk covered in a yellow blanket and a pink wool cap covering the head of a baby almost erased by the wear and tear.

“She had a child?”

“Or he had a child.” Clarice responds. “Maybe the baby is the reason why he considered her rude. Because she hurt the child.”

He turns the picture around to see any other signal on it that can tell more of its life before the burial but the only thing he finds is a stain done by a cup of coffee wrongly placed above it and a date written inside it: *25/12/20XX*.

“Did Jack see this?”

“No.” She confesses cautiously. Is not like she regrets doing so, but she is still violating rules just to give Will something to use. It will be bad if they discover them. “He is mad at you and Agent Zeller, so he is a bit grumpy right now. I also took a picture of the letter when no one was watching so you can keep it.”

“Why?” Will looks around to see if anyone is paying attention to them and their exchange before the letter goes into the back pocket of his jeans.

“I think it was the whole discussion about waiting for the corpse. He is trying to put a good image on you but–” Now that she is more relaxed she starts moving her hands around as she speaks. Will finds it slightly distracting and entertaining so he keeps his eyes on them.

“No! Why did you take a picture?” He cuts her abruptly.

“Because he is vulnerable. You, the baby, Tsubame. All of you were on his sanctuary, so there needs to be a reason why he kept you there.”

※

He killed her.

My dad killed Aunt Chiyo, Will.

He take her way from me for <u>you</u>.

We didn’t ate her. We didn’t honored her the way she wanted to be honored… SHE DIDN’T WANT TO DIE! SHE WASN’T READY TO DIE!!! SHE WAS MY AUNT AND SHE LOVED

ME, SHE GENUILLY LOVED ME AND HANNIBAL TOOK HER AWAY OF ME BECAUSE OF YOU!

He gave you her heart. I delivered her heart. I didn't want to do it…

Why do you think he did it? Was it because she told him to let me go to France? Or because she refused to keep harvesting for him? Was it because she burned the steak? Is he punishing me for killing his cat? Is that it?

The little thing always hurt me when I came home. I have scars around my arms and legs that I have to cover before going to stage because otherwise I wouldn't be perfect. PERFECT. I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PERFECT FOR HIM! I'M THE FIRST IN MY CLASS AND I HAVE A FUTURE AS PRIMA BALLERINA BECAUSE I WANT TO MAKE HIM HAPPY. IF HE DIDN'T WANT ME TO KILL HIS STUPID CAT THEN HE SHOULD HAVE PUT IT TO SLEEP LIKE I TOLD HIM.

No, it isn't fair, Will. It isn't fair to take it on the cat. I knew it wasn't fair but when I came into my senses it was already dead… I couldn't stop myself and Aunt Chiyo helped me to hide it from him. But of course, nothing ever happens without him knowing it first. I think he smelt death when he came home that night. He doesn't like it when people take things he «loves» away from him, but he doesn't doubt to take love away from others.

He's a hypocrite, don't you think so?

I think he is punishing us both. He took her life because she was going against him and because I rebelled against his possessions. I wonder what will he take from me if I hurt you.

I'm going to miss you, Chiyo.

And I am sorry.

———※———

Dad let me participate because he says that he is sorry. I know he isn't but it was better to take all my rage in her than take it on you.

I like you. I actually like you and I didn't mean what I said about hurting you. I couldn't even if I tried. But the girl that we killed… she looked a lot like that reporter that follows you around and says all those stupid things about you. To be honest, we like the idea of you turning into us but we are firm believers that the image she projects about you is nothing but sensationalist bullshit that turns you more into a movie villain rather than the person you truly *are.*

And it felt nice to have a good dinner with my dad without feeling the tension eating us alive… well, eating me alive. I can never read his expressions or his mind, so I never know when he is ready to kill me or hug me.

Dr. Du Maurier says that he is the perfect apex predator.

I think so too. You will never know his next movement. Or maybe you will, you'll get into his head so deeply that I can actually see you as the one taking him out of his throne.

(I will forgive you. If you kill him).

The day I saw you working on that beach I understood why my dad likes you that much, and why he is so fascinated with you. Is not only the way you write, but the way you feel when you work.

Do you know that you smile when you daydream? It was almost as if you were the one grinding her back instead of me, as if you were smelling the blood flying through the air and as if you could hear the shouts of pain coming from the bottom of her guts. She teared her throat screaming, but it was worth. She was worth seeing you enjoying my art.

The drive home unfolded in a tiresome monotony accompanied by the sound of rain and the sound of traffic that trapped him into a long dream of white noise. Will found a way to distract himself by repeating incessantly the image of pure happiness in Chiyo's face as she was holding that baby. Amid this reflections came the oddity of seeing someone violent holding an innocent creature between her hands with such tender care that felt unreal. He couldn't picture Chiyo as a loving mother no matter how hard he tried to convince himself that she was, yet ignoring the affection on her face was a crime that he wasn't going to keep aside.

On the other hand, having him as a father figure is twice as disturbing in his imagination. Under his care any child would turn into the child of his dreams whose sharp teeth pierced through his flesh, or, on the contrary, they would turn into a sack of leather and dried bones left in the basement just for fun. Both of them made for the mere curiosity of watching the experiment behind the mirror.

In the time he was driving, he imagined two distinct creatures made by the same man who couldn't see them as nothing but a project; one lived a perfect life, eating swine and drinking blood with the appetite of a greedy king, adored by a father who saw them as the legacy he will leave in this world after his death. Skin made of gold and eyes sharp as a knife. Their chest always exposed for the day their father doesn't find any other use on them.

The second child was roadkill on the side of the road with is belly inflated like a balloon and the skin separating from its muscles; the interesting part about this particular roadkill are the tubes feeding its body, giving air to its lungs and extracting the waste from its ass. It has a particular owner that will never let it die, but who also enjoys watching it decay.

Will wakes up from his daydream inside of his bathtub once the cold water starts coloring his fingers and lips blue, if it weren't for the light tan painting his body he could almost see his veins exposed. On the mirror of his bathroom he can see a haunted man and the taxidermy of a woman standing behind him, both of their eyes look pale and dead under the dim light of the room, making him aware of how close he is to look like her, and how similar they'll be once he dies.

Chiyo hasn't appeared again on the nights to hunt him on his dreams, however, her presence haunting the back seat of his car serves him as a reminder of reality before and after the letters arrived. Holding her lifeless heart in his cold hands still echoes a sensation that, vulgar as it is, brings an inexplicable satisfaction to him. If police ever finds the fourth body, he will fear two things: one, a new woman stalking his thoughts; and two… joy.

«Kuchisake-onna» has become and expert whispering ideas that seem reasonable every now and then, and although she never answers his questions, she always seems to have a response for the things he doesn't want to know or for things that feel morally wrong until they start sounding coherent. Like chasing down the man who hit that dog with his car, or the woman who murdered her child, or that one other person who shot their friend because he didn't pay a debt in time. Because she knows –he knows–that they will be free for having money, influence or a poor justice system that will put their case aside for «not having enough evidence». But you aren't a vigilante, Chiyo said one day as they saw someone trying to assault a cashier before security pulled them out, you don't want to bring justice… you want to be justice.

The nice Lamb of God.

It weirds him out how in every letter he hasn't stopped calling him the Lamb of God as if he is a saint instead of a sinner who enjoys the feeling of killing a little too much and who is weirdly attracted to the new murderer in turn *(although he tends to deny this same thoughts, the truth is that he will fall again and again into those intrusive thoughts crowned by a pair of antlers black as night)*.

Doing bad things to bad people always feels nice, and he doesn't have to be a genius to know that part of it is the reason why he decided to be part of the FBI before they rejected him and placed him as a teacher. It is part of his nature and his mentality; it is part of his childhood and his adulthood; it is part of his father and the world around him; and it all felt in his shoulders like a cape that he doesn't want to wear.

At 7:30 p.m. he is already at the warehouse staring at his own letter.

Discovering his letter still inside the box is somewhat disappointing; perhaps, he thinks, it's for the better to find it there. Will takes both the picture and a pen out of the pocket of his raincoat, the water sliding down his sleeves leave a couple of drops that he dries by shaking the paper a couple times. Pen, photo and Pandora box rest side by side on the table while he twirls the bracelet in his wrist. In the little time that he has had it, there has been a reduction in his urge to bite the inner side of his cheeks, occasionally forgetting the materials conforming it and its precedence.

Sometimes he even forgets that it doesn't exactly belongs to him because it suits him so well it feels as an innate part of him, like a mole or a genetic disease.

At the end, he forces himself to write the message on the back of the photo, below the coffee stain. It is a short and accusing sentence–he wants to think that he is sounding accusing–but it is all he needs to prove Clarice's theory true, and better yet, it is a good way to draw his attention without giving much information.

Will slides the photo beneath the letter, unsure about the consequences of his discovery, but hopeful that it may cause some form of pain under that human mask that he is so willing to wear.

The sound coming from outside announces a diminution of the rain's force. Petrichor, wet wood and grass are aromas that enter into the room through the open door to concentrate sweetly in a cloud that keeps him company while he decides his next move. The fragrance of the flowers is something that he never thought that he'd miss, although his visits never were to appreciate them, their presence at least reminded him that the last tableau wasn't ready yet and that he got a bit more time before his vacations.

He chooses to walk to the greenhouse after locking the box, every step he takes produces a soft cracking noise that resonates through the place and mixes perfectly with the raindrops hitting the roof. The movements of his little lamp are slow and firm, taking his time to savor and analyze the place completely from corner to corner until he finally finds himself inside the little plastic house. Unlike the rest of the place, it is dirty.

Leaves and dirt cover the floor while some plastic hoses rest in a tangled mess in one of the corners. The tables line next to each other in perfect accommodation, having as only defect the stains covering their whiteness. All the shadows projected by the light on his hand make the place a messy scenario, very unlikely of him, in Will's opinion. But when killing comes, there is no time to worry about the mess left behind if the person who will see it doesn't have much of a problem with it.

Still, is unacceptable, unfitting on his profile.

On one of the walls is a large cable with a switch attached to it so the greenhouse the only place with available light for the moment.

He turns it on.

The light is not enough to illuminate the whole warehouse but at least everything is clearer, demonstrating the imperfect floors and the dust beginning to gather in the surface of the tables. Water filters through a crack on the roof, hitting a corner close to the door that he hasn't adventure to open; it filters, in consequence, to the ground. The damage of the water doing the exact same things over the years is showing already in the form of dark spots of mold.

The whole place holds a strange and beautiful sense of degeneration and oblivion that fits it well.

Will stops his steps in front of the second door, staring at the golden lock that keeps him safe away from the unknown hiding behind it. The sole action of being close to the entry gives him shivers that wash over him like cold water on a high fever.

A thousand question race in his mind as he considers what he is about to do, what he *really* came here to do.

Is there someone behind the door? He knocks twice and awaits for an answer… *no*.

Is he allowed to go inside? The key on the keychain that he gave him tells him that there isn't any other reason for it to be with him if it isn't to be used.

Will he be mad for doing what he is about to do? Will hopes not, Will hopes that the message he sent Freddy is enough to win his mercy.

Trembling fingers make their way to the cold lock as fear and curiosity fight to take control over his body's reactions, producing in his heart a drumming pattern that deafens him the more it increases. Is almost as if he can hear his tendons cracking with every move he makes and with every breath he takes. Uncertainty leaves him once the key goes into the gap of the lock; it turns around slowly, so slow he fears the corrosion might have break it and everything would have been for nothing.

From the fear building up in his chest, grows a sparkle of power that wraps him once the door is finally open, letting him see the hollow space that calls him in. It shares similarity with the ocean he swims in when he is in contact with the dead and the murderers; similar to a dark, moonless night in the woods; oil in his hands and clothes as he works until the sun goes up again.

If Will ever get to see his eyes, they will be as dark and consuming as the interior of the basement that awaits him. Will takes his time to breathe and relax, he has to remind himself about the goodness that will come from his actions and the peace that will exist once he puts his gifts in a better place away from the dubious eyes that will wonder where exactly is this heart that he gave him. He'll turn this place into his own sanctuary, and he'll build protection around it to keep it safe for the day he needs to use it as weapon. But right now, he'll put Chiyo's heart here, to show trust. To show that he is glad about it, but he needs it to be safe from every curious mind.

Down the throat of the devil is empty and it lacks any form that might indicate where exactly he has to step. There is a switch at the end of the stair that he turns on, letting there be light. Eering shadows form behind the objects left around the place, creating a defined separation between light and darkness that seems unreal; his first day in the basement.

The walls are covered by rusty chains, ropes, hooks and cables perfectly curled and position on their respective places. More tables are part of the scenery too, they are full of toolboxes, loose boards, thin roads, screws, sacks with clay, and copper wires. Nothing in it looks abnormal or completely dangerous. This place, full of dust as it is, remains perfect.

In the middle of the room, right in the center of the floor, are two doors of what he guesses are the wells that fed the plants in the greenhouse. They also explain the soft smell of humidity and wet dirt that lingers around. From one of them emanates the other half of the hose he saw upstairs, while the other remains completely close and untouched. Both surfaces are clean, *(unlike the rest of the place)*, a way to avoid having his fingertips engraved in the lids, to that follows the idea of using gloves to reduce the probabilities of Will taking evidence from the place and finding his identity.

After a quick inspection, he makes his way back upstairs with a quicker pace than the one he used to wander around when he arrived. He feels more liberty now that he knows there isn't someone there watching his movements.

Rain has finally stopped, he looks for the keys of his car as he makes his way outside, enjoying the sudden lightness that has appear in him and the cool air crashing against his skin in a violent kiss. His fingers are no longer trembling when he slides the keys out of his pocket, the single beep of the alarm of his car echoes through the forest revealing his location. He couldn't care less about it, not when society is a hundred light years away from him.

Will opens the door of the back seat to retrieve one bag and a cardboard box *(the second document bag is still in his house waiting for revision)*. His left shoulder carries the bag while he holds the box between his arms; he brings the heart close to his chest in an embrace that thanks its presence as he tells it goodbye. Having them out of his house is a weight less into his uneasy conscience, this moral trouble they put him into is finally over until he has to return again–into a crime scene, into the warehouse, to retrieve evidence; to him–and for tonight, he will go to sleep knowing that he won't have to worry for Alana discovering his dirty secrets.

The last thing he did before leaving home was to hide the letters and the second bag in the barn, in the sweet, perfect mess that always bothered him but he never cleaned. He deserves that barn, he says to himself, and to be hidden behind the old freezer away from the light of the sun and away from Will.

The man shuts his eyes tightly and with two fingers, he drums harmonies on one of the faces of the box, similar to a living, beating heart. For a moment he imagines Chiyo alive as she gives him a hug before she starts a journey to the unknown, he imagines her as a childhood toy waving goodbye to its owner before it is forgotten in the darkness. He tells her that he'll be back, and he will look for that little child. He will give them to her.

His intimate daydream is interrupted by the sound of wheels grinding the gravel of the unpaved path; Will's eyes snap open just to be blinded by the headlights of the car. Before him stands a creature wrapped in halo made of white light that stops a few feet away from him. Creature and man share a moment of silence and defiance, and even now, he still has the advantage of being protected by the fire surrounding him. But Will knows that they are looking into each other eyes. His breathing stops like a thigh grip squeezing his lungs without any luck of letting him go.

Fear and anxiety make their way back to the sentient world, yet a new sensation accompanies them into existence; it curls around his guts in a snake-like caress that has him holding a gag. The feeling is an ancient hymn singed before war to give encouragement to the warriors; or maybe a song sang for the gods in a holy ritual that promises people a new beginning, a new world. It is the ecstasy that grows with the knowledge of knowing one's self as ruler of destiny itself. It burns down his spine like a fire he hasn't felt in a long time since the day he saw Chiyo's heart in his hand for the first time, it is dangerously addictive. And it is joyful.

Red color flows to his cheeks as soon as he recognizes him as someone real, someone closer to him than he ever thought before. His heart doesn't race, nor he feels quivers around his body like he thought he'd feel. Will is too calm it scares him.

They wait for the final decision that will alter the game.

He waits for Will's order.

The man nods in recognition and turns away from his car to hide into the darkness of the warehouse as he hears the car going in reverse to where it came from.

A week after they saw each other, Will wakes up with the sound of his phone tone ringing through his skull. Is the first night in days that he gets to sleep for at least three consecutive hours, the time of his insomnia pays him off immediately as soon as the voice on the other side comes out.

"[Grace Reformed Church. I'll send you the address. Now.]"

"Good morning to you too." His voice comes out so deep and raspy that for a moment he doubts it is his. He clears his throat twice.

"[Don't have time for that, Graham. I need you here. The last corpse is hanging in front of me.]"

Will feels a cold bucket of water splashing in his back, taking away the tiredness that he's been feeling all night long.

He looks for Chiyo around the room with genuine surprise in his eyes; the fucking Loch Ness Monster is finally back and they must hurry to take pictures of it, they should run to start a collective hysteria now or it will be too late.

After seeing each other, after thinking that he would finish the game early in fear that Will might have recognized him nights ago, *after* scolding himself for ruining everything… he is back.

Chiyo stands under the door frame, and her sly smile lets him know that all happening in these exact minutes are amusing her. Her empty eyes consume him entirely until all he can focus is the excitement oozing from her and the soft respiration on the other side of the phone.

Behind her is a stain. Dark, tall, big. Its menacing aura grows in soft palpitations that match the rhythm of his own heart. He is there with her, too, in the shape of a stag growing its antlers into sharp thorns.

This one is the good one. The last before Will mourns his disappearance for another year.

"[Graham]"

"A church?" His voice is barely a phantom. The whole situation has him dizzy for a while. "She wasn't made for churches."

"[What you say?]" Crawford says, and Will knows that he isn't mad for the question but for the tone on Will's voice.

“She wasn’t– I– a church? The fourth victim is supposed to be in a fountain. Are you even sure it is him?”

“[Well, that’s why I need you here! He is your killer, Graham. You know him better than everyone else here.]” Will wants to fight the accusation, but the response doesn’t come out of his mouth.

“Is simply hard to believe that he would change *anything*. He’s been following the instru– the book with extreme detail. Going out the scrip out of nowhere isn’t like him.”

Except, it does make sense to Will. Nothing of this is made with the need to be recognized by the public nor to be remembered as the copycat; he works for his own amusement and the greater good. Clues, details and the lack of these have all been done with extreme, calculated control expecting some determined reaction from the witnesses. He'll change no matter what if the results are good enough to satisfy him. A murder out of the book changes the game, but it works as fine as the rest of the crimes.

He is keeping you on the edge of your seat. Will frowns.

“[He left a note]”

“A note doesn’t mean anything. Anyone can do that, Jack. Copycats have copycats.” His voice cracks a little when he speaks, and he begs neither Alana nor Crawford heard it.

“Then come here and show me that this man isn’t part of his plan.”

Silence follows after he hangs up. Will’s hand falls automatically by his side, hitting his leg, yet all that is left behind is a numb sensation spreading an itch over his flesh that disappears as soon as it comes, it won't turn red nor it will leave a mark but now more than ever he wishes for it to cause damage. At this point, even the smallest scratch is a pleasure to have in the name of self-punishment.

Today of all days, his brain is playing the conscious game by questioning his decisions in the past few days. None of them as smart as he made them feel.

The fourth murder.

The last chance to see him before winter covers his steps and Will loses him in the storm.

Two slim arms surround his waist so softly he barely feels the hug–or maybe he is too deep in his thoughts that he can barely comprehend that Alana hugs him–if it weren’t for his clothes he would feel Alana’s softly breathing on his skin. She snuggles closer, almost wanting to fuse with his hips.

“Don’t go.” She pleads.

“He is back.” He answers in a plain tone.

“You can call it sick. We can lay in bed all day, eat junk food until we want to throw up, watch some bad movies.” She speaks in whispers that Will can hear clearly thanks to the

silence surrounding his house. She sounds almost uncertain of her own choice of words.

The circles that she traces on the other side of his hips are slowly ascending to his chest until she finally spreads a hand on his sternum to force him down. He goes without any resistance.

“You don’t have to go, Will. This day can be about you, me, and the kids. Don’t let him ruin a good day.” Alana climbs onto him and burrows her nose in the arch of his neck. “Don’t play any game today.”

Will doesn’t stop looking at Chiyo even when Alana starts caressing the elastic of his boxers, asking permission to go in.

Murder and victim fight an internal and muted battle with different goals. Chiyo wants him to stand up and get presentable for his gift; Will wants to stay home with his wife and the dogs. Notwithstanding, he is aware that Chiyo is nothing but a ghost projecting urges he wants to shut down, and this new projection is playing Crawford’s words in repeat.

This man.

The word rumbles on his head like an echo.

Ofelia isn’t waiting for him at a random fountain surrounded by pretty flowers and soft fabrics darkened by the water, nor is she displayed for the world to see like a trophy. Ofelia has another day out there, living a life that was forgiven by a man who knows no mercy, and she will grow to be old, to know her grandchildren while she sees her hairs getting white and the stretch marks in her skin grow bigger.

She will see the world and she will get wiser. Her arms, surrounding the people she love, will grow tender and warm with every passing day. She’ll see proudly how the world decays along her. He *(whoever he is, as cruel as he can be)* gave her the tender future Shakespeare took from her when he first killed her; he gave her the comfort Will couldn’t show her when he revived her just to see her drown again.

Now someone else occupies her place at the table of martyrs. Not in a million years would he have expected a change in heart like this one. It is an honest movement, nevertheless. Will can already think of a few options why he chose to change the tactic in the middle of the game, all of those options, all of those lines of thought carefully designed and followed without distraction from any. All for his *(Will’s)* own amusement.

He is playing a good game.

‘He is winning.’

Still want to go with him?

‘Yes.’ Murder and victim answer at the same time.

“I can be very convincing.” Alana says, finally putting her hand down his boxers.

Will stops her immediately before she can touch anything down there.

“You are not that type of woman.” He says while pulling a lock of hair out of her face. She answers with a smile that hides disappointment and sadness in it.

“And you'll go anyway because you are not the type of man who will fall for something like that.” Alana let’s him free of her weight before getting out of bed, she stops walking in front of her closet to get clean clothes. “Get dress, Will. You’ll be late for work.”

It is not his rejection that pains her, but rather the fact that she can’t stop him from running directly to danger. She walks away, almost relieved.

After that, it takes him less than an hour to walk out of his house with a thermos full of instant coffee and an empty stomach. This day won’t be any different from the other days when starvation came accompanied with pleasure for being tortured. The outcome will be the same as always: headaches, nausea, irritation… seeing a body first time in the morning will only contribute to his sick and deplorable state, but he is willing to accept that too.

The flow on the road is fast, too fast for his own liking, due to traffic issues he expected to have time to calm down and think of any excuse that could explain the content of the letter but, by the time he sees the cathedral growing at the distance, he finds out that, in fact, there is no reasonable way to explain anything that he is doing.

Will grabs the steering wheel with a white-knuckle grip, not wanting to go out. He shouldn't be there. He is responsible for all those actions, and yet, hypocritically, he gets paid for helping cleaning his mess.

This is not exactly helping if he is doing it for his own form of justice, he knows. But he can’t back off, or they’ll take him away from him without notice of how the case was worked. He’ll meet *him* on the day of his execution...

And there will be normality-says Chiyo–you’ll go back to your normal days without a single scar because you chose to be wise and walk away. You’ll have your wife, your kids, your books... the warehouse. And you’ll be back to be alone with your imagination, waiting for someone’s love to come.

If Will goes away, there will be other tactics. A different approach. He’ll find a way to come near Will and take everything from him until all that exists is just a bag of bones in front of an altar. Avoiding his crimes would mean rejection, and unlike Alana–who can walk happily away–this rejection will be death for both of them.

He needs to die with the puppeteer.

Warmth is already wrapping him in a soft hug that fades as soon as he begins his walk directly to the man standing in the stairs of the church. Civilians and police officers gather around the contention fences while exchanging loud comments about what happened last night; some are possible witnesses or people who will do anything to be part of the investigation even if that means to lie. Amongst the blondes and brunettes moving around to get a better picture of what is going on inside the building, Will sees a single redhead standing perfectly still.

The light of the sun makes her hair a bleeding mass that falls over her shoulders like a veil. It drags attention in the same way flowers attract bees. He doesn't have to look her in the eyes to know that she is staring at him with clear doubt, *(he also wants to avoid having a conversation with her in case she wants to chants 'told you so's' around him)*, he turns again to look at the frozen face of Crawford.

Stoic as a fucking moai, cold as the fucking north pole, angry as a bull in fear and injected with adrenaline as soon as the doors open.

Now that he thinks about it, if in this analogy of his, Crawford is a bull, then ***he*** is the bullfighter. But Will can't be sure yet who will be the one impaling the other first. Chiyo and him are already making bets to their respective sides, nevertheless.

"You finally showed up." Crawford greets him. Both men turn to give a quick glance to their friend in common. "It's been a long time since I've been to church."

Will looks up to the engravings on the building, to the angel holding the name of the church with too much pride.

It's been a long time since he's been to church too. As beautiful as the constructions are, he never liked what happened inside them. All those beautiful words misrepresented by the voices of those who put their personal morals over the good of others; palaces and towers made of gold outraged by hate and fear; paradises watered with the tears of a boy who never comprehended why daddy and mommy never loved him… they are not for him.

His posture about God consists more of something out of fiction than the real image of God and religion, because somehow, is better to believe in Him like a literature symbol than a real «person».

He doesn't like churches.

He didn't like mass.

He didn't like kneeling in the cold, dirty floor.

He didn't like begging for forgiveness for his sins.

He doesn't like the man that he turned out to be.

However, Will prays. Right now he is praying with his head bowed and his neck bared, it is a soft and continue and repetitive *'forgive me'* that comes out with the voice of a little child. He prays to a God that can see how adrenaline rushes through his veins as he comes closer and closer to the altar, and he prays for his words to not be listen, because he doesn't think he deserves forgiveness for having created the monster that has dare to stain sacred grounds with human blood.

God's creation sacrificed for the lamb worshiped by the Devil.

The walk of shame *(if that is what he feels)* consists on him gazing downward to avoid the curious stares of the forensic team who rightfully continue to be dubious by his participation

on the case. This allows him to observe the bouquets lined up along the hallway. Freshly cut, no older than a day, their aroma is both sweet and intoxicating.

He recognizes the gardenias immediately as the flowers that Alana used for her wedding day on the bouquet that she carried.

The gardenia arranges are an intermix with roses, hydrangeas, tulips, peonies, marigolds, carnations, and baby breath that extend before him a path of pink and white petals that contrast with the floor, they create a sweet color that keeps him entertained while he fights to know which flowers are part of the different bouquets.

These are wedding flowers, artfully arranged not just to show their beauty, but to be displayed as an important part of a ritual, ceremonial rather than decorative. He counts thirty-four small bouquet from the entrance to the altar.

(He doesn't remember smelling them back in the warehouse. Was he too distracted or was the smell of his own fear strong enough to mute the flowers?)

Neither when he hears Beverly greeting him does he turn to look at their work.

"So, what we've got since I left you here?" Crawford asks with more severity than intended.

"Well, we know that the blood-splatter analysts will be happy to see this spectacle." Brian answers with a grin. "We also know that this is exactly what my art professor meant when he said that some people are born to create something «breath-taking». Too bad it's murder."

Will barely lifts his gaze to see the puddles of blood spreading down the three-step stair. The frown on his brows disappear and is replaced with the need to submerge one of his fingers in the cold, sticky liquid.

Lick it. Chiyo whispers.

"Zeller." Crawford reprimand him.

"Ropes and hooks are attached to the balconies and to the platform that keeps him straight; both wrists were slashed after he was hung and then he was left here to bleed. By the coloration and coagulation of the blood we can assume a few hours before he was found. Seven to eight hours approximately." Jimmy answers before Brian can continue.

"The flowers haven't been here long. The ones in the altar are the only ones that break the pattern of color from the ones near the benches." Beverly adds. "We'll have a more complete report once we dismount him and we run the autopsy."

"There are also no visible signs of violence and as much as we know, he is *clean*." Brian ends the report.

"What about the note?" Will asks softly.

The three techs look at each other before Brian takes a plastic bag with a sheet of paper on it. Its beau blue color is the first thing to catch his attention when the letter appears before his

eyes. There is a small phrase redacted on it with an unknown calligraphy. Elegant as the one that belongs to him, but plain and less pleasant to see. The back of the sheet doesn't have anything else to add, and the only damage done to it comes from the fold done right in the middle. There is nothing more, not a clue for the FBI to follow or for anyone to drag him as a suspect.

You are cruel, my dear.

Well, at least none them will know that the reason why Will is cruel comes from the photo and the fact that he saw him leaving the gifts back in the warehouse.

Will scowls offended by his words. It takes all of his self-control to keep a sardonic chuckle inside him while he reads and re-reads the letter. The message feels like one of the stupidest things he could ever do; to inculpate him for being cruel is an ironic thing to do considering the bloodshed behind the actions of the author of such short note; and notwithstanding, it also feels a bit overdramatic for Will's own liking. But it suits him. *It is* him.

In this internal joke of theirs, just one of them is laughing louder than the other.

"What does it mean?" The voice of Crawford brings him back to the world, far from the warehouse and the ghostly sound of a beating heart.

"Not sure." He shrugs.

"Not being sure won't help us catch him."

"It's a single sentence, Jack. I don't live inside his mind to know what is wrong with him." The sarcasm in his tone wins him an angry look that he doesn't look at–he is too focused playing with the evidence bag between his fingers.

"Well then you might as well start diving in before I take you ass out of here."

"Don't encourage him, Jack." This time Brian wins the angry look.

"*Out* of the case!" He specifies. "Now everyone get out of the place!"

He shouts, his voice echoes through the entire place and Will is sure it might fall any time soon thanks to it.

Beverly and Jimmy go down the podium and Brian walks past Will directly to the exit. Only Beverly stands by his side for a little while to chat.

"You okay?" Her voice is tender and sweet.

"How does he look like?" He points at the corpse with his head.

Beverly doesn't answer, instead, she takes a last look at the man in the pedestal before she turns her attention back to him.

“Religion. I think he finally found God.” She takes the bag of evidence out of his hand. “Stretch your fingers or you’ll break your joints. You are tense.”

But he can’t, in fact, he would very much like them to break. Thanks.

The door shutting close on his back announces the emptiness of the cathedral and privacy that now belongs to him.

Will stands right in front of the corpse and takes a few steps back to look at the complete canvas with care, not missing any detail. The river of blood guides his eyes upstream, to the frozen drops absorbed by the tablecloth, then to the flowers and vases washed with the scarlet red.

A piece of Eden resides on four large vases stuck with bursts of colors. Glimmers of cold hues serve as a contrast to the red liquid spreading across their petals like toxic rain sent to destroy every sign of life with its viscosity. No, he can’t say that. Not when blood does nothing but elevate the beauty of the flowers blooming for him.

Beverly was right when she said that the flowers break the pattern of white colors from the rest of the flowers. The only thing Will can notice in these ones are the blues that cover the other flowers with their buttons made of hundreds of little flowers. Roses, lavender, lilies, and jasmine are almost eclipsed under the weight of forget-me-nots and blue hydrangeas.

Above are two naked feet splashed by little red droplets. They belong to an Idol who stares at him from his pedestal. Long black lashes highlight fake blue irises, his hair is barely visible due to the layers of laces making his veil, and the beard around his jaw is a shadow that shows better maintenance than the one Will uses daily. Unlike Will, this idolized Saint shows a beauty and elegance worth of paintings and poems. A real life muse.

The Idol hanging above Will is a grotesque imitation of the Weeping Mary that feeds the flowers with something that once kept him alive. It is also an eerie representation of the man for whom it was made.

His suit was made of a blue silk that shimmers under the play of light–it harmonizes perfectly with his fake eyes. A dark blue cloak with golden embroideries falls from his head, covering his body almost entirely. Each thread of gold dances over the cloak creating intricate patterns similar to constellations drawn on a map. His hands are comfortably placed by his side, causing the dry blood to darken the fabric and the laces sewed on the edge of the cloak.

Crowning this fallen Idol is the *pièce de résistance*: A Solar crown living up to the name that he chose for Will, an emblematic halo that completes this bizarre tableau and puts the last piece of divinity in the canvas.

The Lamb. The Sun. The Lover. The Muse. He is everything yet none of those things are Will Graham. Titles and names mean nothing for a man who can’t see himself as nothing more than a bomb waiting to explode.

But his role in this game isn’t defined by his fondness of the names chosen for him. Is not about who he is not, but about who *he is* and *will be* once everything comes to an end.

For now all he has to do is...

Close your eyes.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Let the pendulum on fire illuminate your trip underwater. Wash your purity with dirty water. Feel the steady stream wetting your clothes and skin before it engorges you completely; it crawls through your nose, letting a trait of fire behind that burns from your nostrils to your lungs. Little by little he possess your body by infecting you with his venom until you become another infected ant, until you become him.

See man on the bottom of the ocean. Amid the thousands of arms and hairs from the past martyrs is an idol watching you with dead eyes, cold gaze as the water of the river behind your house. Stretch your arms and take his bleeding hands, hold him thigh.

Put him in the pedestal.

The weight of the man between his arms disappears as soon as he leaves him on the pedestal. The layers of cloth will help to hide the mechanism that keeps him stiffen; he takes his time putting bobby pins and needles in the right places.

"You are beautiful, Will." He says softly, a lover chanting love praises without giving others the opportunity to hear. "I hope you see yourself the way I see you."

He raises his sight to look at the eyes of the unconscious man, but all he sees is Will.

Will Graham has a soft smile on his face fill with tender love, in his eyes he sees comfort and acceptance. He watches him work slowly in the suit and the final arrangements on the flowers in complete silence, as if he were hypnotized by the movements of his hands placing details and the ritualistic knife before him.

This version of Will looks powerful, healthier, free. The same creature he saw the night of the first letter, the creature born the day he imagined taking Chiyo's heart out of her chest. «Beautiful» is a word too small to describe what he sees in the man before him.

"Divine." Will suggests abruptly. He can talk.

Will can see the other version of him painting his cheeks with make up while he sings an unknown song. He looks happy, too comfortable in his own skin to be considered the man who shakes awake after nightmares and whose copy mechanism is to isolate himself from the world when he is overstimulated, in the edge of a crisis.

"Although I strictly asked for a bespoke, I need to make some corrections on the sleeves. Too long and they won't give us the results that we want. Too short and it won't look good."

"You look happy doing this." Will chuckles.

"I was happy when I killed you."

“But I–the fake me–wasn’t. I woke up disoriented, shaking. I died in fear. Crying. Praying.”

“I know.” He says almost proudly. “I heard you. The human body takes over thirty minutes to bleed out from the wrists. So I stayed forty minutes watching you go.”

“And now you are projecting me here as a payoff for what you did to «me»?”

“I wanted to see myself through his eyes before he disappears again.” The answer sounds so sincere that it makes him shiver.

“How do you look?”

“Stunning.” The last pin goes in place. Both reflections stare at each other. “Religion is nothing compared to what is happening in this moment. I look ravishing dressed as a Saint in fine clothes. Temptation itself. It is weird, though, to feel the need to reprimand my urge to kiss and praise myself.”

“You are obsessing over this.” A sardonic grin appears in Will’s mouth.

“Perhaps.”

"Will you go back to your depression once you–the real murder–goes? Once you can’t see us anymore?”

He wants to deny it. But he will. He will write twice as large than he usually writes in his letters, he will go to the warehouse twice a week. He will look for this feeling everywhere he goes.

“Tell me, Will. Who are you, really?”

The knife laying over the table feels heavy now that he holds it, its cold and metallic surface promptly warms under his touch and an electric emotion runs over his body at the sole idea of watching Will die. Will knows his destiny is sealed, and unlike the man who died for him in the other world, he is eager to experience it.

With quick and precise movements he opens Will’s wrists. The flow of blood makes its way downstream splashing the altar in which he towers.

“I baptize you in this day of glory. Be reborn into something better. Fulfill your purpose and enchant the Sun. For this fake prophet is sacrifice in the name of the Lamb.” He takes a few steps back, watching the scarlet river staining his offerings. With extended arms he proclaims: “This is my design; every line and shape have been carefully carved in this weapon that will slain the Lamb.”

He likes churches for how beautiful and fragile they are.

He likes masses because he likes worshiping.

He likes kneeling because he likes the pain in his bones.

He likes praying not for forgiveness but for thankfulness.

He likes to be the free man that his God has turned him into.

Will awakes slowly. The light of sunlight comes through the open door illuminating the main hallway and by consequence, the altar and the man kneeling before it. He is so deep into his unconscious that he can barely notice that people are coming inside.

His shaky hands are held into a thigh grip that hurts yet he keeps the same position despite the pain it causes him. He sighs relieved for being alive and closes his eyes to pray once more.

He shines thanks to the light of the sun touching His back. Neither sound or external forces are enough to wake Him up from the deep trance that He put Himself into.

And He is kneeling in front of the fake idol.

The sole idea of hearing Will praising his work is delightful, even more now that He has found religion on it.

He keeps that memory somewhere safe. In the chapel built for Will.

Chapter End Notes

I think I'll post this on tumblr too, but I don't know. Still thinking about it.

Have a good week, bye bye :)

Because Of You

Chapter Summary

Hannibal Lecter is a girl in love

Chapter Notes

Soooooo... I won't present Hannibal Lecter as a half-decent man. If this man could keep Will in a jar, he would. I say this because I mention something about him being hit and hitting Will as part of their daily dynamic (an abusive relationship), I know this is obvious considering how they treat each other on the show, but I will still remain you of that.

In other news, this is the largest chapter so far (comparing it to the past and next chapters). 52 pages... I think I overexaggerated but I enjoyed it.

Anyway, how are you? (❁´◡`❁) I hope you had great days and if you are going through something hard, you find peace.

Enjoy :)

And sorry for any grammatical issue that you might find.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He hates the fake imitations more than he hates the *absurdly boring, plain, lifeless beige* waiting room in the tax office. They couldn't even put a proper painting in the wall to light up the space and all that is left is a clear disrespect to fashion. He knows elegance can come from minimalistic statements; he *loves* monochromatic rooms but, really, *that* is one way to ruin a whole movement based in neutral colors.

The room looks old. Like the room of an older person. Now that he thinks about it, fake imitations are more useful to society than the lack of fashion sense in a room. Fake imitations were made to be destroyed, metamorphosed, ruined, *used*. The perfect way to practice without ruining the original masterpiece.

By now, Will must be in the church already doing His job. It is a shame he wasn't there earlier to see His reaction first handed; he worked so hard in every detail just for him to be late thanks to a patient on the border of their roof. He would've appreciated it if they just jumped instead of having second thoughts that would only end up delaying the inevitable; a

few pretty words and he had another date with this patient. How stupid of him to even answer, but investigations are a terrible thing to happen over all now that he is so close to meet Will. What he needs is more free hours to be with Him instead of being attending boring people with boring problems.

Now, there are two things he hates: boring rooms and boring people.

But if he's been honest, anyone who isn't Will Graham is boring. The man has the power to annihilate the world if He wants to; only a few words and a few laughs and *anyone* would be on their knees begging to have Him, *begging, pleading* for Will to break their hearts and eat them as a way of sacrifice.

If there is someone alive who can break his neck, then it is Will. Long, slim fingers will go around his neck ready to squeeze the life out of him while their eyes stay connected until tiredness and numbness ends up killing him.

He has imagined different similar scenarios since the moment he knew about Will's existence, each of them had been nothing but a burst of excitement that helped him get over boring rooms and boring patients. They draw a smile on his face hard to hide. Most of the time people guess it is there because something happy happened to him *(even when he has experienced the most devious insult made by men)*, and he just nods. A pretty compliment will hide his true thoughts, deviate the talk and keep in heart the fact that none of this persons would ever understand the wonders that Will Graham can create in the life of the reject and the forgotten.

"Did anything good happened to you today, Doctor Lecter?"

Something happy did happen to him. Will happened.

This Queen of Hearts of his is something divine with enough power to chop off heads without touching them, without giving orders. Will needs no more but to wish for it and Hannibal will concede. Will takes boredom out of any situation.

«The darker the night, the brighter the stars. The deeper the grief, the closer to God.»

He couldn't agree more with that statement; in another world he would have died thinking that Dostoevsky was wrong when he wrote that, defending until the end that no god in the sky is strong enough to take people out of their grief. In this world, however, exists a God who can alleviate any pain. He only found religion when he was at his lowest, and he is so glad it came in the shape of such holy man.

Black hair like night itself; penetrating eyes of a blue shade that even the sky is envious of; the body of a fighter who can take any man down with only the power of his arms; a smile like a knife cutting through his heart; personification of beauty itself; and a mind… well, Hannibal knows that if the occasion ever comes, he will be eating Will's brain first. Then goes His heart.

The façade of the church appears before him, finally.

Choosing churches wasn't easy, not all of them got the characteristics that he wanted for his canvas, and the ones that *did* have them weren't easy to access. The place has been closed for a long time now, behind it is an alley almost empty but surely desolated when night comes. The scenario was practical and a miracle conceded to him, all it took was to avoid the few cameras around and be quiet when placing his gift.

Is a good thing he burned its vocal cords with chlorine before displaying it, that way it could try to scream as much as it wanted without any success. Complete silence. *Peace.*

Don't get him wrong, he loves to work with music. Is a little pleasure he become fond of when he was working as a surgeon. Surgery rooms really become poetic when there is harmony playing on the background while he tries to stop someone from dying; of course, the greater pleasure came when they stopped breathing.

Is more rewarding to know he had power over choosing the fate over his patients death than in their lives, he had to be smart and choose them correctly–of course–so a dangerous surgery could end drastically instead of profitable.

The same problem would end up with different results depending on his mood that day. It was fun to play roulette with the dying victims of a car accident. That was something he loved about working at a hospital. Now, working as a psychiatrist has brought him many memorable faces and experiences that had kept him entertained *(is beautiful, really, to appear doing good while he sees his patients slowly decaying into their true form or into insanity)*, but playing with someone's mind is not as good as staining his hands with blood.

Hannibal walks out of the car. His presence alone is enough to get the attention of a few people around him. Some staff of the media circle try to make their way into him by shouting and pushing each other to get his name first. Distasteful as it is, he does find it entertaining, the peak demonstration of human nature.

Animals ready to kill for what they want.

It makes them look like chimps killing and eating babies only because they can or because they want. A few of them are more likely to penguins and dolphins succumbing to their carnal pleasures careless of the consensual agreements. Some others are simple pigs, educated at some extension and smart in their actions, falling into aggression only when needed. And a ridiculously small proportion of the animal kingdom is composed by honey badgers who developed a *surplus killing syndrome*.

Whichever they are, Hannibal eats them. Is a good thing the animals he chooses–in the derogatory sense of the word–aren't in danger as the ones living in the wild. If he thinks about it, it is ideal too because he can't see himself eating a honey badger. He is too fond of their resilient nature to even consider damaging them.

He has no taste for animal cruelty. The gooses he feast are not forced fed. They eat only as much as they choose and only in their natural environment.

Freddy Lounds stands afar from the crime scene. He wants to smile at her and tell her that what she wrote last night is the best gift that can come from someone who isn't Will Graham,

and that he is flattered for her words. But doing so would be like putting himself in the spotlight, giving Miss Lounds the permission to follow him around just like she does with Will. She is too perceptive, similar to Will.

Maybe that is why they hate each other. *They see the worst of themselves in the other.*

One of the police officers controlling the multitude lets him come into the perimeter of the crime scene. Agents and analysts and local cops are outside of the closed door, they all seem relived for their few minutes of rest granted by the man who–if his supposition is right–is inside wearing his skin for a moment.

That is an attractive view. Will wearing his clothes, *His hair a mess and His flesh covered in scarlet red strokes; He turns to look at Hannibal with a dazzling smile. Ravishing.* He sighs happily at the perfect image of the perfect, idealized Will.

Jack Crawford recognizes him and the cold expression that he always wears changes to something more compassionate and relaxed. He looks alleviated to have backup from the man who is making him work night and day without mercy. Hannibal returns the expression with a short nod before someone else comes into his vision.

Black, straight hair that shines with the sun every time she moves, sharp eyes full of secrecy and intellect. For an instant he sees Chiyo walking from around the corner. Pretty and eternal. He hopes it really is her for the mere pleasure of seeing her dying again, for the thrill of killing her in front of Will so he can give Him her heart personally. The woman raises her gaze to find his eyes, breaking Hannibal's daydream.

Some people around start shushing and gossiping as soon as they see him approaching the gathering; some of them have tried to be close to him, other had tried to fuck him, and the best of them had been really resourceful when he started asking for Will. None of them questioned his interest when he told them about the FBI's plan to make him Will's psychiatrist. They were all eager to help if that meant putting a muzzle on Jack's rabid dog.

Beverly copies his walk towards Jack for their small reunion before the doors open.

"Doctor Lecter!" Jack sounds odd when he is content. Beverly stands right next to Jack with her hands on her back.

"Is good to see you again, Jack." Hannibal holds a hand out that Jack takes almost immediately. His grip is strong and firm. He likes that type of grips; they shout violence. "Although I would've prefer it was in better conditions."

"I can say the same thing, Doctor. Thank you for assisting us in such short notice, anyway."

"Is not a problem when this type of emergencies come on. I get that your profiler might need help if anything happens." Playing dumb. Bedelia would laugh at him.

"Give him a little bit of credit, Doctor." Beverly says before Jack can continue. "He hasn't had another breakdown since Tsubame's case."

The name sounds foreign yet familiar. Maybe one day, Will will call her by her real name in his presence. Give her the recognition she deserves.

“Well, this is his third case. I wouldn’t want him breaking at the very beginning of the investigation.” Hannibal smirks in agreement with Jack’s words.

“How much time until the doors open?” He asks, hiding perfectly the excitement that feels for the answer.

“Two more minutes. If he doesn’t call for me then we go in, so get yourself ready to meet him, Doctor. He can be a bit intense when he meets new people.”

Hannibal wouldn’t wish anything different. He said it once and he’ll repeat it again: *Will can get angry at him, shout and tell him that He’ll never understand him, because all that Will can give him, he wants it.*

Someone he barely remembers approaches them, calling his attention by slightly touching his arm. They don’t need to do so. Hannibal can smell their anxiety already oozing out of them.

“Do-doctor Lecter? I wanted to thank you for accepting my sister as your patient.”

Ah, the psychotic. She will be an excellent hunter. “Don’t mind at all. It is my pleasure to be of any help.”

“Doctor! I also wanted to thank you for the recommendation you gave to my mother. She is doing better now after her surgery.” Another blurry face says.

“I’m glad to hear that.” He smiles wildly.

“Doctor Lecter. I’m–”

He can’t hear pass that. Even if he likes the attention and the praises, his mind is too occupied counting the seconds to meet Will. Faceless people become soundless creatures to whom he only nods and thanks without any true meaning.

They only matter to be around him because he trained them for that. He gave a lot of resolutions for their problems, missed a few investigations, didn’t answer a couple of calls and then he had them all surrounding him.

It is a spectacle merely created to get Will’s attention for the good first impression, and now that it is happening before the doors open, he can’t be any prouder of the perfect timing.

The sound on the background makes him turn his head slowly to see the cause of all the fuss interrupting his concentration.

Blinding light illuminates a small group of people surrounding a creature that seems to be absorbing the light of the sun. Small followers chant praises and love poems towards the dark creature leading them into destruction while he only stares at Will with a burning gaze.

He can tell them that they are being guided by the Devil, but he chooses not to.

Will goes back to praying.

Will is kneeling before the altar.

Praying.

Head lowed and eyes shut.

Will is praying to the fake idol he created.

The image in the gorgeous scenario seems extracted from a movie about cults where the high priest talks to the god that will inevitably bring their destruction. And even that is vague to the precise description of what Hannibal is seeing in this moment.

Their eyes connect for a moment when Will turns to look at him and the gathering surrounding him, and Hannibal can't avoid being consumed entirely by the obscurity expanding Will's pupils like a type of drug hard to let go. The small action is enough to have him wishing for more; he wants to run towards Him, take Him on his arms and press Will onto his chest until they become the same creature.

He shines thanks to the light of the sun touching His back. Neither sound or external force are enough to wake Him up from the deep trance that He put Himself into.

And He is kneeling in front of the fake idol too.

The sole idea of hearing Will praising his work is delightful, even more now that He has found religion on it.

He keeps that memory somewhere safe. In the chapel built for Will.

Consumption. Hunger. So that is how love feels for the swine, no wonder why they become so lethargic and stupid when they find someone worthy of their attention. His perfect stoic mask slides for a moment, enough to let Him recognize the monster behind it, yet he is quick to put it back before anyone else can recognize the damage that Will builds in him with His sole existence.

(He wants to take those pretty eyes out of their sockets, put them in a flask and keep them near him. Tie Will to a chair a force Him to watch him eating one of His eyes. Hannibal can also take one of his own eyes out and interchange it for Will's eye, sharing the same organ. Exist with the other inside themselves).

Beverly drives everyone away with a simple order, Crawford puts them into work with another order, and finally–*finally*–Hannibal is free to walk down the aisle towards the altar. Towards Will.

If he concentrates enough, he can hear the bells ringing on the top of the building, making the construction tremble with every step he takes to bring himself closer to Will. This is a wedding between evil and goodness under the ceiling of god; her *majesty* is witness of the sinful union between a Saint and a Heretic, and she can't do anything to deny their love because that will be starting a war that she won't win.

Will stands before the fake idol dressed completely in black. Gold and lapis lazuli had been sewn into the borders of the collar of his shirt, and a white veil made with lace covers his head. The corpse of an innocent beast poses above them as remembrance of purity and sacrifice, its guts out as a memory of his lover's ire and the fresh warm blood already served in golden cups for them to bless their matrimony. It will be Will's offering to Hannibal.

Acceptance.

"Do you need help?" His own voice sounds distant.

Will opens His eyes and turns to see him through His lashes. This view of Will kneeling before him, looking up with a dizzy expression and fury in His eyes is addictive. His heart skips a beat when he imagines Will pressing His head against his crotch.

"You aren't supposed to be here." A husky tone accompanies his words, causing an electric shock that runs along Hannibal's spine towards his head. He repeats it on his mind once and again even when he talks to Will.

"I'm afraid that I must. I'm working on the investigation." He offers Will a hand to take.

The man doubts a bit before taking it to help himself up, from His wrist hangs the beautiful combination of bones and wood that Chiyo created a long time ago. Hannibal can't take his eyes out of it. He saw it on photos, he imagined it because *someone* told him, but to stare so closely at how good it decorates Will's skin is a blessing that no other God could grant to him. After all, it isn't anything else but a mark. A good dog's collar.

Will's touch is light as a feather, nothing more but a touch made to keep His balance. Calloused hands kiss against calloused hands in a wonderful sensation that creates fire where their flesh touches. It extends up to Hannibal's arm before he can even register what is happening. He isn't sure he will be able to let go of that soft grip or that he will let Will go for the matter.

Will stands up elegantly. The expert movements of a man who is so used on working on the floor and who has developed a pair of splendid legs that can lift anything in this world. He lets go of Hannibal's hand, leaving a numb sensation in his palm that feels almost rude.

Hold it again. He wants to tell Him. Don't let it go even if you have to rip it away from me.

He smells like water, petrichor, dogs, flowers and blood. It is a smell that suits him perfectly in personality and essence, and it is glorious. He couldn't have ever imagined how good Will's smell would combined with blood, but he must admit it is an elixir he won't ever forget. If only he could break the distance and sniff Will in like cocaine.

“Graham!” Jack’s shouts cutting the bubble of appreciation that Hannibal built around them. Will rolls his eyes in response to that. “What the hell were you doing kneeling there.”

“I was in a trance. Didn’t mean for it to happen.” The repressed ire that comes out of His voice is unnaturally attractive. It is like pure venom and repulsion mixed and thrown to Jack with the intention of dissolving him out of the picture.

He is mad because He was interrupted.

“Next time you can say something before you go contaminating a crime scene.”

“*It was an accident.*” He repeats again between his teeth. “I didn’t know it would happen.” Will brushes His hair with His fingers, reviving that sweet smell that Hannibal rolls in his tongue to engrave every flavor in his taste buds. It alone is nourishing. “Maybe next time you can cover the place in plastic before I go in. That’ll give you some peace.”

This is Heaven for Hannibal. Not only His voice is a melodious sound made with a sleepy, controlled and suppressed violence that only shows Will’s true nature, but He is also aggressive when He speaks. He has worked so much in controlling Himself that the only way to alleviate the tension is by being rude. And for any reason Hannibal can’t understand, that is glorious.

“Excuse me?” Jack sounds unjustifiably offended. Hannibal wants to tease Will.

“Sorry. Is the shock.” Even His regret sounds irritated. He hates Jack from the bottom of His heart.

‘Adorable.’

“Sorry, who are you?” Will looks him in the eyes. Hannibal smirks.

Blue irises are surrounded by a bleeding halo made with veins thick as roots of a tree. He looks drugged.

“This is Doctor Lecter.” Crawford begins the introduction. “Doctor Lecter, Will Graham.”

“Jack’s hunting dog.” Will responds, careless of Jack’s apathic reaction. *Oh, to put a muzzle around his mouth.* “Where is Clarice?”

“I’m afraid Miss Starling couldn’t come due to a health problem. Jack called me in her place.” Hannibal, so eager to start a conversation with Will.

“Hey, pretty. I brought you water.” Beverly comes out of nowhere to tease Will, interrupting the so-called conversation.

Will, however, looks happy to see her there. He doesn’t even flinch when she calls Him some ridicule pet name. He doesn’t hide the smile that comes into His face even when His eyes tell a different story.

His eyes still contain a type of obscurity that darkens His gaze, He looks close to killing someone just because they dared to talk to Him, but that won't be Beverly. Not when Hannibal finally finds out the type of expression that she puts on Him. Atta girl.

Will looks at Hannibal up and down twice with disdain before He walks towards a pew with the bottle in hand. It is the same type of walk a drunk man puts when beer starts kicking in: slow and lazy. That too looks extremely attractive to Hannibal even though he used to find it disgusting before. Will, however, makes him think that he wouldn't have any problem with Him being an alcoholic abuser that breaks his jaw in very opportunity. *He'll love it (and then he might feel the urge to return the same treatment. They'll look good with matching wounds).*

Will sits down on the front pew and drinks half of the bottle of water Beverly gave Him, His sight is always stuck in the fake idol with an emotion that Hannibal can only describe as awe.

They wait patiently for His verdict.

(Is amazing the power He has without even trying. He is so unaware of how wonderful He is).

"So, what's this?" Crawford asks once Will is done. The man on the bench turns to look at them but only makes eye contact with Hannibal and then He places His sight back to the corpse.

"Exposure." Will points at it with the bottle. He makes sure no one is around before He speaks again. "I exposed him. He is exposing me. He is mad I entered on his basement and saw his heart."

"This also feels like gratitude." Hannibal speaks without taking his time to analyze the body. Is not like he needs to do it but it would have given a more natural reaction to the situation. "For whatever reason it is, the killer is thanking the author. Forgiveness even." He keeps looking at Will's micro expressions changing when he puts another point of view. "He is showing the face of the author to the world, making the fight fair. But he is also addressing Him as a Saint. Gratitude from our point of view, forgiveness from the point of view of the Saint."

"He is expecting me to forgive him from his sins?" Will asks mockingly. Hannibal melts.

"No. But he believes You merciful."

"Is he religious?" Crawford comes between them. He forgot he existed. "Because this feels like the same thing he did back at the basement. Correct me if I'm wrong, Doctor, but aren't the Sun and the Saints both an image of God?"

"While they do be images of *a* God, it doesn't mean he believes for Will to be a real God." Of course, Will is the real God, but to confirm it this early wouldn't do any good. "He is just building a character around Him. Elevating Him to the same position where the killer believes himself to be."

“*He* isn’t God.” Will intervenes. The tone on His voice makes him realize that something he said is considered an offense.

“No, but the devil is the strongest of all the fallen angels. The one to fight his creator face to face in rebellion. He, too, is Your creation and an image of Your cruelty, while You on the other side are the image of protection and light. *His* creator. He is putting You as God because You are the only one worth of his ire. You two are on the same level of power. Contra parts destined to kill each other.”

“You did create a monster, Will.” Beverly agrees after the Doctor. “Will he go against you too?”

Will shrugs because it is the wisest thing to do instead of going aboard into the discussion of who is God and who is not. The philosophical question will be left for the letters where they can be more personal about their answers. Hannibal will answer them sincerely, needless to say, he will have to be careful not to repeat his words.

The fake idol comes down from its pedestal and is placed inside a plastic bag; Will sees the parade of ants walking with an offering in their hands as they walk away.

“Whatever it is, he believes in God, which is different from being religious.”

“Any religious imagery he uses in his work will be linked to art itself, not a personal believe.” Maybe he said too much, but Will seems to consider something different. “Everything here is a mere spectacle. The killer has taken all the references that could be consider part of an offering in this particular crime. Blood is part of many ritualistic practices.”

“It also shows human cruelty.” Will looks at Hannibal, then to the splatters of blood on the table. “Willing to take as many lives as he can just to satisfy an idealization of a cruel God.”

“God isn’t cruel.” Beverly says calmly.

“God is cruel and merciful. Good and evil. One can’t exist without the other.” Hannibal responds to her to which Will softly shakes His head with a grin.

“Good and evil doesn’t have anything to do with God. He is just a reflection of *pleasure and pain*.” Hannibal feels flatter when he hears the quote coming out of Will’s mouth. He has memorized his letters. “He doesn’t seem those two concepts as something that could be apart. God is made of contradictions.”

“Then why put you like a God if he is going to be the devil?” Jack asks genuinely interested in the response.

“Because he wants us to fuse.” His smile widens, is sardonic and lethal. “He doesn’t see god as a mystical creature, as something to pray to, or something to believe in. For him, God is another philosophical character and with that I can agree. Morals are based in a large list of commandments born in religion and spirituality. But now that he found me, he is ready to put a face to the name and show me to the world. Expose the type of God he prays to.”

“He likes You as an idol. As the image he created for his own amusement.” Hannibal takes courage and sits next to Will, giving him enough space to avoid personal invasion. Will, however, chooses to stand up and walk around while He thinks the analysis thoroughly. “He projected an imago of you. It is a term from the dead religion of psychoanalysis. An imago is an image of a loved one buried in the unconscious, carried with us all our lives.”

“An ideal.”

“The concept of an ideal always searching for an objective reality to match. I have a concept of You, just as You have a concept of me.” He tells this to Jack, notwithstanding, it is still directed to Will.

“A projection of me based on his deliriums rather than in my real self. I doubt he would like me if he ever gets to know me.” Will agrees; His stomach growls when He stops walking in front of the puddles of blood on the floor with His gaze lost in their profound color. No one comments about it.

“The concept of an imago is also revealed in the bible.” Beverly adds. “It makes sense that he is using both representations in his canvas. *Imago Dei.* Created at the image of God.”

“So that is what he meant on the letter? About you being cruel because you are his imago of God.” Jack walks closely to Will.

It takes Him a few moments to process what he just told Him. “Yes and no. This man was created at the image of *me*, and I am by consequence cruel for simply being God. To be honest I think I am ready to start my own religion.”

Jack sighs. “Anything else?”

Will shakes His head slowly. “Nothing that can help me find him. I’ll tell you more when the autopsy is made.”

Jack nods in acceptance. He is holding back the need to force Will to look deeper into their killer’s mind. Hannibal smiles softly. Will has all the information of the case locked in the warehouse they share and still, He has choose not to say a word. *Fascinating.* He could have found a way to cooperate with Jack without giving away the information to anyone who might be related to the killer, work with him and catch Hannibal in less than a week, but this is precious. Hannibal can detect the lie immediately coming out.

“Go write your report. We’ll talk more later.” He says with resignation. “Doctor, I need to talk with you. With you too, Katz.”

Hannibal stands up. Will doesn’t need to hear twice before He walks out of the building with a rushing pace. Hannibal follows until He gets lost amid the crowd of agents walking from one side to the other. He wants to follow Him.

“What do you think about him, Doctor?” Poor little, grumpy Jack and his boring, tasteless life. Plain as the fucking boring beige rooms. Because of him Hannibal would lose the opportunity to follow Will.

“He has a strong personality. His line of thoughts make it easy for Him to build forts and boundaries hard to break.” Divinity really. Flawless. Beautiful. Smart. Elegant. Passionate. “He is very perceptive. I expected more aggression coming out of Him but the concept can’t even be associated.”

“I think that he likes you.” Beverly answers with a smile. “Will is not the type of person who indulges rapidly into any conversation with others. It took me months to get a proper conversation out of him when we first met.”

Hannibal hums. “I think I’ll get a better picture of Him if we talk more. For now is too early to define His personality, I would like to keep an eye on Him while He works in crime scenes and on the examination room, if that is okay with you.”

“Is okay, Doctor. I thank you for your time.” Both men shake hands. “I expect to see you Monday morning to discuss your future appointments with Will.”

“Of course. If He accepts, that is. I can’t force Him to do anything He doesn’t want to do.” He nods politely towards Beverly. She returns the same gesture. “Now, if you excuse me I have to take my daughter to the airport, she is living in a few hours.”

“Of course, Doctor. Thanks again for being here.”

Both Jack and Beverly shake his hand before he turns towards the exit.

He is in a rush to get out of the church before Will even get to His car. Brian Zeller walks into the building. They give each other jagged, polite nods before continuing with their paths.

Once outside he looks around to the crowd and the place where he saw Will’s car to be parked when he arrived *(he purposefully parked behind Him to have an excuse to walk together without disturbing Will)*. So Will hasn’t left. The other option is standing to his left and there, next to her, is Will.

Will looks for Freddy in the multitude, it isn’t hard to find her, and as expected, she is already watching him. Waiting.

He walks towards her, careful that neither Crawford nor Beverly is watching him talk with his worst enemy. She opens her mouth as soon as he is near him, he cuts her right way.

“Told me so. I know.” She smiles triumphantly. “Good job.”

“What do you expect from all of this, Will?”

He shrugs. “Contact. <u>He</u> will look a for a way to thank you. A letter would be ideal.”

“You are doing this all based on hypothesis?”

“I’m giving you content for your blog. The least you can do is to thank me.”

She rolls her eyes and stops to look at something behind Will. With a small movement she points towards it, making him turn around to see Doctor Lecter standing on top of the stairs watching them attentively.

“Who is he?”

“Who knows.” He turns back to her. “Not a word and we both can keep each other entertained.”

“Gosh. Ew. You sounded like a perv.”

“At least I’m not the one stalking people.”

“Not yet.”

It is Will’s turn to roll his eyes and walk away from her. Freddy does the same. She won’t be far in case she finds a way to avoid the feds and enter the church. Will secretly wishes her luck.

“Will!”

Will turns His head to see him from head to toes with a quick motion before He centers again in the multitude hiding His car. He doesn’t stop walking, therefore, Hannibal walks to Him, taking huge and quick steps to reach Him.

“Can I help you with something, Doctor?” His voice is dry and hasty.

Many things… but not right now.

“I was thinking of inviting You for breakfast, we can talk about the case and compare our notes while we are at it.” Two police officers tell the crow to move aside so the two men can walk through them.

The people near Hannibal seem to be dubious about asking questions that will be left unsolved. Meanwhile, the people near Will stay silent and even take an extra step behind. He can smell fear on them.

“It would help to know each other if we are going to work together.”

Will finally stops to face the doctor. His eyes are focused on Hannibal’s purple tie and the golden pin keeping it in place.

Is a beautiful pin, Hannibal must say. The upfront part has the shape of a feather. A gift from Chiyo for Christmas. He is not a man who celebrates Christian holidays, but they did it because of Abigail and the beautiful propaganda that the world sold to her from a young age.

However, he does like the parties, the attention, good food, and the praises that come from a well-handled feast. He put it on because of how important this day is; the blue suit and the

purple handkerchief are also due to Will. Colors of his eyes and the first book he published.

“I don’t think it is wise to be a friend my therapist... or to work with him as my colleague whatsoever.” With that said, Will re-starts the march towards his car with Hannibal following closely from behind.

“Mind to tell me if Jack told you about it?”

“No. I just know. You look like the kind of person who will be able to «handle me». Strong personality, strict morals, and probably a life of achievements working with unstable patients like me.” They stop by Will’s car. He leans on the door to keep talking while Hannibal stands still to listen everything He has to say. “Jack could’ve brought anyone to cover Clarice, but he chose you because he needed me to meet you first in a place that isn’t the BAU or your office. See who you are. See if we can *coexist* in the same place without me trying to rip your head off.”

“I suppose this has happened before?”

Will nods, slow and short. “Let’s say that my therapist had a first wrong impression about me. They quit, and I was left without any reference to whom might be the one to help little poor me.”

“You scare them. You build forts in Your mind that are impossible to break, even for You.” He pauses. “Jack tells me You are not fond of eye contact, and You don’t like socialization either. If he has to guess, he will say that those traits are closer autism than antisocial disorders.”

“Quick in *your* assumptions and diagnoses, Doctor.” He sounds mad. Irritated. “Eyes are distracting. You see too much. You don’t see enough...” Will, who was staring at the curious people leaving the perimeter, turns to look at Hannibal in the eyes. Beautiful. Hypnotic. “And it’s hard to focus when you’re thinking those whites are really white or he must have hepatitis, or is that a burst vein? So I try to avoid eyes whenever possible. And no, I don’t like socialization. People are tiring and boring.”

“You must prefer animals over people, then. Dogs or cats?” He asks with fake ingenuity. The smell of dogs never leaves Will’s skin.

Will’s semblance and posture change into a more relaxed position. He is already focused on another thing when He responds. “Dogs.”

“I imagine what You see and learn touches everything else in Your mind. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at Your associations, appalled at Your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of Your skull for things you love.”

“*Stop that.* Don’t psychoanalyze me. Not if we are going to work together.” His arms cross over His chest, and the grip He gives to His arms is hard enough to let Hannibal know He is choosing pain over violence. He wants to slap Hannibal. “I think that breakfast together won’t be good right now.”

“I excuse my behavior. And my words. Our job is to observe, and it is hard to avoid this type of interaction.” He takes a step forward, in case Will wants to reach for the handle of the door. *(He won’t. Because that would mean stretching a hand towards Hannibal and, by consequence, to touch just a little of him).*

“But You are hungry, and I am hungry. Maybe we can have a better picture of our situation if we eat first. And I promise not words against You.”

The multitude breaks in two like the sea did for Moses. The Moses in question is an ambulance that will take the body all the way to Quantico for further examination. Will follows the car until it disappears from His vision line. His stomach growls again.

“Not peaking inside my brain?” He answers in a husky, low voice. Almost a whisper.

“Not yet. No.”

“Where are we going?” He is calmer... why is He calmer?

“Leave that to me. After all, I am the one inviting You.” Hannibal looks around for the source of His relaxation. There is nothing.

“I’ll follow you.”

The restaurant he chose isn’t as luxurious as he would prefer it to be, nor the type of cheap experiences that Will is used to have. Someone told him about Will’s preferences when it came to food and restaurants, preferring simple places when He is with friends or medium high-quality business when He is in the company of the wife.

With time, he will be elevating the price and the rankings of the places that he chooses, once He gets used to expensive places, expensive food, expensive wines... for now, this one is perfect for Will, not for himself. Its quiet ambiance and the low flow of people keep the place serene, increasing the possibilities for relaxation.

He walks behind Will, watching the perfect figure of a man who never stops staring the ponytail of their waitress. On the inside, Will might feel that He doesn’t belong there, or maybe He is too careless of everyone’s perception about Him that His mind prefers to drift away while the autopilot of His body follows the young woman. But on the outside, Will looks like a cold man who doesn’t have the time or energy to deal with others’ pathetic lives. He doesn’t even address the existence of those around Him.

Will walks like He owns the place and the life of every person sitting in there.

His head is high, rolled sleeves that reveal strong and tan forearms full of cuts, the walk of someone used to modeling... that might not be right, but He does move His hips with an elegance and a rhythm that has Hannibal wishing to place his hands on them to feel their swinging. Will is the only person who can wear a raggedy flannel and pants full of dog fur and still look good. *(He better do something about that fur soon, or it’ll drive him crazy).*

The waitress leaves them at their designated table–somewhere far from the other costumers so they can talk freely–before offering them the menu and two glasses with room temperature water.

“I suppose Wendy’s will kill you with only opening the doors.” Will says once the waitress is gone.

Hannibal gives Him a stretched smile. "You assume well. I’m incredibly careful about what I put into my body. This means I end up preparing most meals myself.”

“We have something in common, then.” Will puts his glasses away, into the pocket of his shirt. “Tho, what I cook might not be into your preferences.”

“As long as it isn’t tasteless, I’ll be eager to eat anything. I find no pleasure in boring things.”

“Then you aren’t missing a lot from Wendy’s.” Will smiles at his own joke.

Hannibal is suddenly down in a spell cast by Heaven. The chains around his neck and limbs are a just a fair price to pay if the one putting them on him is a man blessed by the gods. Blessed by Aphrodite herself. War and beauty are shaped in the grace of that smile and those sharp teeth that he would love to feel in his flesh, claiming him. Consuming him.

“I took You for someone who didn’t like chit-chatting.” Hannibal drinks from his glass. The cool water is refreshing, a soothing relief to the compulsions that Will creates on him.

Will looks at him through His eyelashes. His eyes barely acknowledge Hannibal before they drift quickly back to the menu.

“What makes you think that?”

“The lack of eye contact, not eager for socialization, the growing irritation for being here. Things I’ve heard from Your ex-colleagues. I’m just connecting points.”

Will scoffs. Annoyed? Maybe. “You are right. I don’t like it when people don’t have anything interesting to say.”

“Then we share the same hate towards boredom.” Both give each other a stretched smile.

Will has His sight lost in the view outside the window once He has decided His first dish. If He is amazed or disappointed by it, He doesn’t show it. Rather than the view, He seems lost in something else, something that only...

“Jack trusts you.” He interrupts Hannibal’s examination. “He trusts you enough to put you in the same room with me after interacting with a murderer’s mind. He thinks that you will be able to put a muzzle around my snout.”

Well, isn’t the idea *quite* delicious?

“If I do or don’t depends on You and Your cooperation. My job is to help improve Your mental health and to help You prevent any relapse.”

“That doesn’t work for me. Therapy is hard when you know the tricks.”

“Then I’ll help You to unlearn them. We can build forts together that will provide You with any substantial qualifications that will keep You away from the dangers that attract You.”

“You are a good psychiatrist, aren’t you?” Will’s posture changes. He is sitting more rigidly, is the position of a wounded animal ready to attack and fight till the end.

Hannibal changes the tone of his voice almost immediately, softer and more docile. “I can assure You that I am not. There will always be someone better than me and someone worse than me. Helping people is not a competition–”

“Oh, but it *is* a competition. It is for the FBI, the police, the government, doctors... is only psychiatrists and psychologists who deny those accusations.” Hannibal doesn’t answer. “We like to lie to ourselves by reminding us that a big ego is a problem inside our practices. We can’t let our narcissism cloud our perception of reality. Otherwise, it won’t be therapy but a confessionary.”

“Do you have any sins You want to confess, Will?”

The waitress comes back with a little notebook on one hand and a pen on the other. Both men place their orders. Will chooses Benedict Eggs; Hannibal goes for Blueberry pancakes accompanied with bacon. Two black coffees, thanks.

“You know that you are a good psychiatrist. Some people do their best, and some people do their worst. Everyone makes mistakes. *But not you*.” A sip of water goes down his throat, showing a different movement in His Adam apple that Hannibal can’t stop staring at. “You know that you are the best. You believe it. And you will continue to show everyone that you are the best. For you, mistakes are meaningless.”

Hannibal smiles softly at the personal assumptions Will has made of him. He can see why people dislike Him. Being in therapy is like having a fight against a psychic who can read the mind of the fake mind-reader. Is like trying to deny sins in front of an omnipotent God.

“I do feel regret, Will.”

“Feeling regret and not caring a lot about mistakes are different things. Overall, when you have achieved avoiding making mistakes. You know how to treat people how to help them, how to *read* them. How to talk to them.” Hannibal feels tickles on the corners of his mouth threatening to put a smile on his face. Will is proving him. Pushing his professional boundaries, just like He has done with the others. “You are better than your colleagues, better than... everyone around you, really. You just say no because of ethics and morals and rules, and because you are too polite to admit something like that out loud.”

“My. Was it something I said?” His time of being psychoanalyzed is finally here. Will is returning the favor.

“No. Just connecting points.” Will shrugs, amused by His own quotation of Hannibal’s words. “You are a psychiatrist. People in our field are often narcissists. We believe to have

right over other people's minds and lives. We also share antisocial traits, limit personality disorders, savior complexes... delirium in general. We think that we can help everyone, but in reality, we can't care less about the life of our patients or clients. Our discoveries and their treatments and the theory are all based on a big question. What if?"

"What if, indeed." Hannibal drinks again. He keeps a bit of water on his mouth to avoid smiling.

"You care because you are supposed to care. You help because you are supposed to help. But in reality, patients are nothing but monkeys waiting for their turns in this big experiment of yours. Psych students are, at the core, a part of God. That is also why people run to a church or therapy when something goes wrong."

"You couldn't be more right. It also explains why people look for holistic interventions when it comes to their mental absolution." Hannibal follows, his voice sounds amused and excited for the conversion. A reaction different from the one Will expected. "We like to open the minds of others and inspect them for our own amusement. We reunite with other colleagues, and we talk about our cases with fascination. And if the time is right, we even dare to expose our patients' problems to the world in some magazines.

"Some start to fetishize their patients, other manipulate them into their own destruction; because we are too fascinated by our curiosity."

Will has His full attention on Hannibal, He is watching him rather than avoiding. The blue of His eyes follow the movements of his mouth, and every now and then, they concentrate in the red obscurity of Hannibal's irises.

"We want to see how far we can go before the balloon explodes. We have extraordinarily little understanding of our own minds so we choose to study others instead." He adds.

"Then I don't think it will be in my best interest to conjoin with someone whose traits of personality can end up affecting me. Not when I'm trying to catch another narcissist."

There it is. Hannibal shows his sharp canines with a smile. Is amazing how easily Will can put a genuine smile on his face. He isn't afraid of saying the wrong thing, He is careless about hurting him. Hannibal appreciates that.

"Well, I don't think that mentioning my experience as a surgeon can help me win my case nor Your trust."

"Of course you were." The glass of water is empty. Will plays with it. "What was you specialty?"

"I was a general surgeon. I served on the ER for many years. I killed too many patients, and I chose to change careers. I passed my interest in anatomy to culinary arts, and no one has died in my office."

Under his practice, a few. In his office, none. A very important distinction.

“Death on ER is nothing unseen nor unheard-of. The people you lost were a few on a big pile of bodies and expedients placed somewhere.”

“And they still felt like I killed them.”

Will analyzes him for a moment:

“You truly think that’s true.” Not a question, but a statement. Will takes His right wrist with His left hand and starts playing with the bracelet of bones. “You are genuine in the way you dress and the way you express yourself, which is nice. And it isn’t a show for other people nor to apparent being someone you are not.”

“I like honesty.”

“So do I.”

“Then, am I really that untrustworthy to be Your psychiatrist?”

Will thinks it thoroughly.

“I suppose not. You aren’t dangerous. The traits you show are the same for others. The fact that you know how to channel them and actually do good is what matters the most. However, I don’t want anyone inside my brain.”

The waitress is back. She places the plates first before a second waiter helps her with the coffee. He pours the liquid with mastered movements, not spilling a drop while he works.

Hannibal and Will thank at the same time. He takes the utensils on his hands, waiting first to see Will eating. Then, he eats.

(Not as good as the ones Abigail does).

“It was nice to see myself through Your eyes, Will.”

The coffee is good, though. Recently blended and pressed in a French press. A recognizable taste. He hopes Will likes it too.

“You don’t think I was harsh?” He really sounds appalled, as if Hannibal is weirder than He is.

“Of course not. I take it as a compliment. Is not always that you can hear strong and honest words coming from someone who isn’t looking to please.”

Will swallows before responding. “I didn’t mean it as a compliment. I was just... speaking without any inhibitions.”

“I still take it as a compliment.” They smile at each other again. “It was amazing, Will.”

Will avoids eye contact. He looks down to His plate, taking His time to cut and serve the eggs and bread on His fork. It is then that Hannibal notices He is trying His best not to eat fast. An

acquired necessity born from working in a time-consuming job. He is actively enjoying the conversion now.

“People find it weird.”

“Not me. I collect oddities.”

Will chuckles. Is a precious sound that Hannibal keeps in a place of his memory, a record player that puts the music in buckle.

“Oddities find each other.” The phrase comes out of His mouth without hesitation.

And it feels so good.

Hannibal isn’t a man who usually believes in destiny, but this man right in front of him is a wide range of possibilities. He is a tree whose branches and roots can take him to different endings, capable of ruining the life that he built for himself and changing it forever. Hannibal can already feel the electricity running through his body, activating his heart, burning his brain. For this man, he will believe in the future.

They finish eating in silence, a pleasurable silence, nevertheless. One of them is thinking about dinner, and the other one is a mystery that Hannibal wants to open up. His little head is running in circles in a question that He wants to ask, but He isn’t prepared to say.

As odd as He can be, Hannibal is still unknown territory for Him.

“Do you find him attractive?” Will speaks softly.

“Who?”

“Our killer.” He doesn’t blush, but by the way He is playing more intensively with the bracelet, Hannibal can know that even He finds the question uncomfortable to ask.

“I haven’t seen his face, so it is hard to say if I find him hot or not.”

Will looks up from His plate and laughs. That is a better sound.

“Not his face. His mind. His actions, I mean.” The smile doesn’t erase from His face.

“Of course I find him interesting. Between us and off the record, I think he has a great taste. Tsubame and the new man are living proof of that. Art is hard to perfect in canvas, and I think it might be even harder when time is against the artist. Besides, he is working with real models, and it may be even harder to achieve the expected result.” Will gives him a jagged nod. “And you? Do you find him attractive?”

“Yes.” He is quick to respond. No doubt, no hesitation. Just a boy who is happy someone asked Him about His new toy. After a pause, a long pause where both of them weigh His reaction, He continues. “But no. I have to say that I don’t. I mean, he is recreating all my work from his point of view, adding new colors and techniques to it, I have the right to feel curiosity about him. Part of me likes to know how my characters look in his eyes, but the

other part of me is disgusted by it. I'm having constant contradictions between what is right and what is wrong."

"Is part of the human nature to face different contradictions in behavior and thoughts. Who of us had not thought of killing someone, choking another, and slap a few? The problem lies in the need to choose one over another to take responsibility of our own believes, therefore, we let our decisions lie in a set of influences and we blame others for our own contradictions, forgetting that right and wrong do exist. We just don't want to face it."

"Explain that to the world. Defend me with that, and they will drag you too into the same cell where they choose to put us." Will taps the table with unharmonized movements. "Because of him, they will put me in the spotlight, they will point at me with accusatory fingers and I'll be back to being a killer because I had the incredible idea of writing his source of inspiration."

"You are not a killer, Will."

He is. And He knows He is. Using His own words against Him is useless because Will knows the thrill of killing someone. The joy that comes from watching their blood running and the satisfaction that taking a life produces.

"That's not true."

"I intend to defer."

"I *am* a killer."

"You are not."

"Haven't they told you?" The look in His face gets darker. He is serious about this. "About the five victims?"

"They warned me. But You killing two people of five isn't different from me killing fifteen patients over the years. You are a Saint compared to me."

Will wants to add something else, but He doesn't. Is not the right time to tell everything about Himself. Nor the place.

Hannibal comprehends it and doesn't push the subject any further.

"Why did he change tactics?" Hannibal changes the topic. "Why not keep Ophelia as part of the plan."

"For the same reason he is changing everything I wrote. He wants to prove to me that he is better than my character. Not because he thinks my character is lame, but because he wants to impress me like in this case, and with Tsubame." A grimace of disgust comes and goes in a flash on His face at the mention of the fake name. "And because he wants to make it clear to me and the public that he isn't just another copycat. He is the real thing."

"Any suspects then? Someone close to you who might be interested in the author?"

Will shake his head softly after drinking his coffee. The waiter from before offers him more. He accepts.

“None of them fit the profile.” He says after the man leaves them alone. “If they were murderers... Beverly would be the type to dissolve her victims. She would love the cleaning more than she likes the killing. Buying dissolvent, disinfectant, soap. For her, everything is on the details. She wouldn’t let a bloody corpse like him... Hell, I don’t even think she would leave any corpse at all.”

“What about Jimmy Price?”

“He would be a sadist. Closer to what the BTK was.”

“BTK?” Hannibal looks around for the waitress that attended them; he makes a movement with his hand to call her attention.

“Bind, Torture, Kill. It was Dennis Rader’s sign on the letters he sent to the media.” Hannibal tells Him to wait with only raising a finger before He continues with any further information.

The pretty woman comes closer with a beaming genuine smile. Being them the first clients of the day, she can allow herself to show her full potential. A vibrant energy that will be leaving her soon in the course of the day until she is nothing but a volcano close to exploit.

And they say that he is the most prolific killer in actuality when customer service and exploitative corporations exist.

He asks for two desserts, something acidic-sweet for Will and something bitter-sweet for himself. Abigail has really created bad habits for him that he is not that willing to let go.

The bright woman goes, and Will continues with His story.

“It was part of his M.O. when he was active. Mostly, women entered into his victims. For Jimmy, it would be similar but not the same. Every gender in the world would be at risk if he decided to become a murderer. Is the pleasure of violence that impulses him, and of course, he wouldn’t enjoy detailing pieces of art to be exposed. He would leave them to rot somewhere.”

“Plus, he isn’t attracted to you.” His cup of coffee is empty. He calls the waiter.

Will pouts. “If he were, he wouldn’t be patient about it. He would act on mere instinct. He’d get rid of my wife, my dogs, any close friends... I would be his last victim.”

More coffee is poured in Hannibal’s cup. Then he leaves.

“And Brian Zeller?”

Will thinks for a moment as He drinks from His coffee. The response is already in His tongue. He is just looking for a way to express the idea.

“He would look for someone weaker than him. Kids, young women–any women really. All of them thin and unathletic. Easy prey. His own small ego wouldn’t let him do the stupid thing of confronting someone stronger and clever than him.”

“A hedonistic serial killer then.”

“No.” Will perceives the close presence of the waitress with their stuff. He waits until she is gone to keep talking. He learns fast, and He doesn’t confront Hannibal about the dessert. “That would be Jimmy and Beverly. Brian would be closer to the description of a power-control killer. And yet, none of them would end up leaving tableaus as beautiful as the one that the bitch leaves for me.”

A bitch is a bit rude. And still has an opposite reaction on Hannibal from the one he expects when being called a bitch… did He call the tableaus *beautiful*?

“Jack Crawford doesn’t have the time nor the understanding for arts, so we can dispose of him. Your editor, perhaps?” Is a good thing he is good at hiding his emotions, because being praised–and criticized at the same time–by Will is something that he didn’t expect from the conversation. He expected more hate, repudiation, anger, not… being called *beautiful*.

The bitter chocolate melts on his mouth deliciously, that’s how he has decided that Will’s praises taste like. A Maury would be excellent to accompany it, but the menu was short on its wine selections, besides, even if they had it they also have for rule not serving alcohol before one o'clock. He takes another bite as he waits for a verdict.

“Closer to a victim than a murderer.” No hesitation again.

“Freddy Lounds.”

Will closes His eyes to enjoy the taste of lime from His Sicilian Ricotta Pie. Not the best on the city by smell, but god, it does know how to please a man like Will. Maybe a Fresco di Masi Bianco; fresh and not overly citrussy, it would accentuate the flavor of the lime. Will would love it.

“She is already obsessed with me. But for some reason I can’t imagine her as a murderer, at least not one as my killer. She would be on the side of «divine justice» trying to kill me before I kill.”

“Which takes us to the last person on the list. Your wife.”

The bubble of pleasure around Will breaks. He gives Hannibal an incredulous glance, more of a warning for the doctor than a sign of offense. Either way, He asks Hannibal to elaborate.

“Unstable relationships can bring one of the partners to an altered state of mind. The fear of losing a safe space, previous obsessions existing within it, fear of being alone, money related issues... those are all factors that can impulse someone into a streak of dubious behaviors.”

“My murderer is a white man, older than me, stronger–” Well, thanks. “–with the capacity to carry the unconscious body of a man similar to me in height and weight into a church, and

then place him on a pedestal. Unless I married a super woman or a shapeshifter, then I don't think she is *him*. Aside from that, it is an interesting analysis, Doctor."

He doesn't sound as offended as Hannibal thought.

"I apologize if I offended you. Or your wife."

Before Will, Alana was one of the smartest, cheerful, and pleasurable people that he could ask for. A brilliant mind to have near him.

After Will, she is starting to be annoying.

"Not at all. It was entertaining."

"I am glad." Hannibal takes the last part of his cake "But we are not done yet."

Will thinks and comes to realization almost at the same time. He nods, dubious.

"What type of murderer am I, Will?"

Will doesn't want to answer that.

The fact that the Doctor has shown himself open and eager to listen to every word that has come out of his mouth doesn't give him the permission to push his boundaries–as much as the doctor wants him to look with scrutiny inside his mind and soul.

He should be considering himself a party trick, brought to a fancy place to amuse and entertain the odd man; in another world he would have felt the need to leave his dish half eaten, pay for what is his and go.

But not in this world. Not in a world where someone is actively listening and speaking to him like a decent human being. If he leaves, he will lose the chance to meet someone else who accepts part of his oddities, someone who isn't Beverly. If he fights, he will lose the chance to meet someone who isn't Alana.

He could ruin the particularly good first impression that he, somehow, gave the doctor. Hell, what he said before is enough to make people run away from him, and yet he is still there, waiting patiently for Will to give him his criminal profile.

"Care to confess any sins, Doctor?" He speaks low and steady.

"I have no more sins than the ones you have and the ones I already confessed to."

He's been doing so far so good. He hasn't speak this much in a long time. Alana is barely home; Beverly is at work all the time and when she isn't she talks about herself and her job *(which he doesn't mind. He adores listening to her)*, and he doesn't talk much with Georgia if it isn't book related.

He must be high, drunk, or dissociated because he hasn't stopped feeling light-headed since they started talking. When was the last time he laughed so freely, or that he enjoyed being around someone? The doctor is a witch, that's for sure. He should burn in a pyre of fire before he enchants Will.

It will be better for him, too. To hate and repudiate Will, to make his way as far from Will as he can before it is too late and he becomes another name on the list of possible victims.

"Don't say I didn't warn you."

The doctor makes a movement with his hand, inviting him to continue. "I'm responsible for my petitions."

Will sighs. Sea blue eyes connect with the chocolate and cherry colors in the doctor's irises. His pupils get bigger when he sees Will's full attention placed on him.

And the pendulum begins to swing like Death's scythe collecting the souls of the living.

"You would be a ghost… No fear of being caught, no fear of being unknown for the rest of your life. But if you are ever caught, you have power, and you indulge into that power. It would be nice to pose for the magazine covers and grant some interviews with generalized answers made to keep the attention on you rather than to show honesty. You'll do it for the fame for the sake of the show. Not just once, but as many times they catch you... because you have the money and connections, even with the evidence on the table, you would walk freely because you are loved by many of your colleagues."

A pause. Reading any reaction from the doctor that tells him to stop. He proceeds.

"You are the most dangerous of them all. Always staying in the public eye, creating fake stories about false accusations and how you are a victim on this. Your charismatic behavior will make them forget that you are a monster, and you will be glad they do because everyone would love a word from you. Pictures, interviews, TV, apologies from the government for being so dumb and incarcerate a man like you.

"And the news travel fast. They reach everyone against their will. You'll be eager to show your face everywhere because, somewhere, in some funeral house, in some cemetery... there will be someone being tortured by your existence. You don't need to be present to terrorize people. They just need to know that you exist and that there is nothing they can do to make you go down because you belong to the top.

"And if someday they catch you, and you do end up in prison for life, you'll become a legend. The story parents tell their little children, the perfect murderer to exploit in TV and movies and games. The poster in the room of all those true-crime lovers who talk about how their content is ethical because they are the voice of the victims while they get their pockets loaded in money despite the real feelings of the families. You'll be the study subject in every psychology or criminology or laws class.

"You'll keep terrorizing people even after your death... and what's more interesting is that you would make society go insane. They'll become murderers in their minds, imagining the

millions of ways they can kill you to serve justice. They'll fight, and they'll send you death threats. The world outside would be a fucking joke to you, a show done for your entertainment. And if you ever feel that you are being forgotten, you'll find your way out into the world again, because a monster like you can't be stopped."

The trance ends. Chiyo is cheering him with a muted round of applause, she stands behind the doctor and the smile on her face seems to reflect more the amusement of the doctor than the excitement that forms in him every time he enters in trance and rattles about this kind of things. The doctor, on the other side, remains immobile, there is a big smile on his face that is too polite to show his teeth.

Will is breathing hard, he feels dazed and sleepy. This was a mistake.

He is about to beg for forgiveness when a round of applauses comes from both the doctor and the waitress that is holding their bill. They both stare at him with fascination.

"I didn't mean to hear your conversation, gentlemen, but that was a fantastic description. I felt chills hearing you." She says almost frantic. "You don't happen to be a writer, do you?"

Will blinks the dizziness away a couple of times before answering.

"No." His voice cracks. He cleans his throat. "No, I'm not. I'm just a profiler."

"Well, then you should be. It was wonderful, don't you agree, sir?" She directs the question towards the doctor who nods softly.

"He should definitely be a writer." Lecter regains his composure again and accepts the bill, giving it a quick lecture before placing his card inside the folder. "I was shivering the whole time, and the narration was so good I almost thought I was the killer he was describing. I could barely remember who I was when he finished. Truly, it's a good way to end breakfast."

Lecter politely thanks the waitress before she leaves them alone again. The smile on her face doesn't fade as she walks by.

"If that is the murderer you describe me to be, then consider me enamored of you. The description almost sounds like your murderer."

"It didn't bother you?"

"God, no. In any case, I think we can use this to understand your murderer even further. Besides, I couldn't become the man about whom you are talking. I couldn't do that to my daughter."

"You have a daughter?" The topic awakens his curiosity, making him forget the uncomfortable feeling that the trance and the sudden attention gave him.

He always considered having children, *«human children»*, but Alana didn't want to, he agreed with her. Besides, with the things going on inside his head, it is clear that he isn't the most genetically ideal to have kids, so he never blamed her for not wanting kids, and with her

job taking her into long trips and his lack of experience creating sane relationships with others, he grew used to the idea of having his dogs as his only children. He is fine with that.

“Yes. She is nineteen. She is an amazing ballerina. If I ever become the monster you describe, it would pain me to leave her alone in this world, to disappoint her in that way. I couldn’t bear to lose her love.”

“She is the only person really close to you.” An affirmation, not a question. Lecter doesn’t seem to mind.

“Her mother left when she was little. I raised her with the help of my Aunt Murakami and her maid.”

“I have that in common with her.”

“Eager to talk about your mother now, Will?”

He smiles widely, teeth and all. “Maybe in our next appointment, Doctor.”

“Was this part of your initiation into therapy?”

Will weighs his answer. “Nope. I still don’t want you as my therapist. It would be unethical to be this «friendly» while in therapy.”

“I have to agree with that, then. In our next date, perhaps?”

«Date» feels like a strong word. But he can’t find any other close to describe what they are doing right now.

“Next date.”

The waitress is back with the card and the ticket. Both men thank her at the same time and stand up in synchrony, Will takes the lead while the doctor follows him from behind. He can feel Lecter staring at him as they make their way out of the restaurant, but it doesn’t cause him any further discomfort.

Outside, the bright sun blinds them before their eyes can get used to the natural light. Will breathes in the warmth air, relaxing with it every muscle on his body. Like he just woke up from a dream and he is now forced to go back into the nasty reality.

“I think Jack has a wrong impression of you.” The doctor say. He is waiting for Will to walk first to their cars.

“And why is that?”

“I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little tea cup, the finest China used for only special guests.”

Will stay silent before breaking into a clumsy laugh. “Then how do you see me?”

“The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.”

“Anthony Dimmond. 36. Born in France, residency in the US for nine years now.” Jimmy says, almost cheerful. The melodramatic voice comes when he says: “No partner, no children, not a dog to bark at him in rainy nights.”

“He disappeared... drum rolls!” Jimmy does the drum rolls with his fingers before Brian continues with the presentation. “Three weeks before his murder. There aren’t further signs of fighting, torture, incarceration, or anything that could prove that he was a captive.”

Will rolls his eyes, he keeps reading the autopsy report. “You found chlorine in his system?”

Beverly takes sit in a chair close to her. Her head is almost at the same level than the corpse’s head.

Anthony Dimmond lays in a cold surgical table, chest and head open in precise cuts to reveal the internal organs that were previously removed and re-accommodated in him once the autopsy was over.

She takes a tongue depressor out of a cart and rolls all the way to the place where Anthony’s neck is. She points at two little dots on both sides of his neck. They are almost invisible.

“He injected chlorine on his neck to burn the vocal cords, so he couldn’t scream once he was awake at church.”

Doctor and profiler walk to her, taking quick inspections on the dots. Too small to be seen easily, but evident if one knows what their looking for.

“What about the Etorphine?”

“That is a semi-synthetic opioid. Five thousand times stronger than morphine.” Brian answers.

“Is used in veterinary. Mostly to sleep elephants. Is hard to get so we ran an investigation on the names that had buy the M99–which is another way to call it–and we found Tsubame’s name on it. She was a frequent buyer.” Jimmy tells from the other side of the room; he is inspecting the clothes that they took from the corpse. “She didn’t even work for the zoo, so either she had an elephant at home or she was using it on her victims.”

Neither Lecter or Will say anything else.

“He didn’t take any organs?” Lecter asks after a while. He waits for an explanation.

“No. We found *everything* inside of him. We have the bet divided in two: this one is another killer or the second killer who worked with our main suspect on the previous case.”

Four heads turn to look at Will at the same time to set the winner of the bet.

“Nothing was cut and left inside again?”

The three techs shake their heads. He keeps thinking.

“Anthony didn’t deserve to be part of… whatever he is doing with the organs. If we keep the idea that he is putting them on a weird altar, then he might have felt the need to exclude him from it… he was only an ornament, made to look pretty.”

None of them wins the bet.

“Why?” Beverly asks, slightly disappointed.

“Because he wasn’t me. He was a three weeks replacement until he wasn’t interesting enough. But he was still the perfect muse for the canvas… the murderer might have even changed plans somewhere between killing «Danae» and meeting Anthony. He needed to get rid of Anthony some way and the best way he found was this.”

“So… he just grew tired of his toy?” Jimmy comes closer to where Will is standing to retrieve the report.

“How mature of him.” The techs chuckle at Lecter’s joke.

“Well, at least we know that he had a nice last dinner. Whatever he ate wasn’t in his stomach long enough to be fully diluted, but it is still hard to recognize what it was.” Jimmy adds. “At this point you should start thinking about the Midnight Ripper’s good qualities as a husband, Will.”

“Midnight Ripper?” Lecter asks, uninterested in the odd commentary.

Will doesn’t mind too much; his brain is creating lapses between reality and imagination that has him feeling quite drunk. He hasn’t stop giving Anthony side-eyed looks since the report left his hands, and the longer time passes, the stronger he feels the need to connect with Anthony. See what is the feeling forming on his guts.

“That’s what Lounds started calling him. And the media. If you ask me they are giving him too much power with a name like that.” Jimmy answers. “But if he is a good cook, great at art, loaded with money, and obsessed with me, I would give him a shot.”

“Oh, we all know Will is waiting for the right moment to give him a shot.” Beverly and Brian laugh loudly at her joke.

Somehow, that takes him out of the beginning of his trance. His head hurts like Hell.

“What about his clothes? Bespoke as Tsubame’s dress?” He asks when they are done laughing, yet his eyes go back directly to Anthony’s face.

It is a powerful magnet that call him into submersion. Chiyo tells him to dive in, to meet the man that he could be… that he can be. The imago that the Ripper has made of him looked beautiful; it was a perfect interpretation of those moments when his finger pulled the trigger liberating a tingling sensation on the palm of his hand, and the sensation of power and peace

that came afterwards. It was the perfect image of the feeling he had watching his victims on the floor while he was still standing, above them.

“Bespoke. Bought with his own money.” Someone answers.

Sounds are a confusing mess now. If they are talking to him, it doesn’t matter anymore because now Will isn’t Will. He isn’t Anthony either. He is not the Ripper. He is the ghost of a man who enjoyed watching bodies full of holes, who enjoyed the smell of hot blood and who couldn’t help but wonder how would it taste like to drink directly from their wounds while their lives were escaping from this world.

‘Who are you?’

He stares at the unknown man. He is no one to him. To Will. He had no other purpose but to serve as a mere toy. Equal and different to Chiyo in so many things. For starters, there was no love, appreciation or close relationship to him. Whatever it was, it was fleeting and goal centered. He won’t be a ghost into his memories the same way that Chiyo is, but the emotion that he is awakening on him is haunting.

Will can’t say that he is envious *of him.*

He died watching the face of his killer, knowing him. Anthony ate and drank with him for three weeks, and he existed only for Anthony during those same three weeks. After this, he will go missing again and Will isn’t sure if he will have the decency to talk to him after everything he has done…

No, he can’t just leave me like this, in suspense. He can’t give all his time to a man who is less than nothing and then disappear. What did Anthony did to deserve that position at his table? Did he obsessed over the Ripper for a whole year? Did he stopped eating, sleeping and bathing because he couldn’t stop thinking about the Ripper? How did they met? Where? Why not killing him and leave him somewhere to rot instead of giving him the «honor» of being one of his muses, one of his paintings?

If only he was alive, I would kill him again. I would choke him to death while I feel how Anthony scratches my arms trying to damage me. I would tie you to a chair, take your nails one by one and then take your teeth as a form of punishment. I could bite you, cut you into pieces and force you to watch how I consume you day by day, keep you alive until your mind is completely broken and then just fray the resting skin out of your body. Let the maggots and flies give you a last horror as you feel them crawling over your exposed muscles, carving their way into your flesh, and then expose you to the world as one last humiliation.

WHY do you deserve to be immortalized as the image of God in front of the masses when HE has said a hundred times before that the title belongs to Me?

“How dare you taking him away from me?” Will growls.

“Will!”

He gets back to reality. His grip on the edge of the table is making his knuckles hurt, a white burning pain that takes his mobility away. Doctor Lecter approaches him, but before he can touch him, Will is already making his way out of the examination room to vomit on a bin close to the room. The thoughts he had and the images that accompanied them makes him throw up again. When he is done, he takes a look around, noticing the curious glances of everyone who can watch them through the crystal walls. They get back to their tasks as soon as they feel his heavy stare lurking over them.

Lecter and Beverly go into his rescue. She gives him some napkins to clean his mouth while Lecter takes his hands to inspect them and help the recovery be less painful. He doesn't want it to be less painful, though. He wants it to hurt. He wants Chiyo to feel his agony for putting those thoughts on his head. However, the doctor doesn't stop and each roll of his fingers over his knuckles feels better than the last one.

"Are you okay? You were doing *that*, again." She speaks softly and tenderly. With compassion.

He doesn't answer. Instead, his question goes directly to Lecter. "How long?"

"Fifteen minutes."

"You saw him doing that for fifteen minutes and didn't interfere?" Crawford walks to them out of the examination room, he must have arrived when Will finally came out of his trance because he didn't notice him there. His heavy steps and angry voice are enough proof of his deception over Lecter.

"If it serves as any comfort, it is all part of my analysis over Will. I take it that he has done the same before, therefore I need to know if this cases are aggravating or diminishing."

The man is so calm. Confident. Unlike Crawford, he doesn't need to raise his voice to impose authority, nor he needs to stump over everything to show the venom that hides behind his fangs. He takes a step forward, putting his body between Will and Crawford like a shield, protecting both men at the same time. Protecting Crawford from the bite that his dog is about to give him and prohibiting Crawford from putting the dog to sleep.

Lecter is indifferent of Crawford's reaction, fearless of the way others might think of the person who is defending Will. Something that neither Beverly has done for him, and now that Alana isn't here, he takes the place of savior. No, not a savior...

"Doctor, I comprehend that you have your methods but they can't be used in a place like this." He is trying so hard to not make a scene in front of his workers.

"I disagree. This is the type of troublesome ambient that impairs him, no better place for examination than this. If you want to make him work his issues elsewhere, then I won't stop you, but results won't be the same. He is having problems *working for you*, then I will watch him while he is working so I can know if it is something serious or stress caused by your praxis."

The place remains silent for a long uncomfortable period of time in which Beverly does nothing but comfort Will by caressing his back with slow circles. They don't feel as good as they should, but he doesn't move. Then, Crawford warns Lecter.

"If he interferes with evidence because of this it would be on you."

"And on you." The same accusatory tone comes from Lecter.

They stand in silence, watching carefully at each other's movements in expectation of a wrong movement that makes them attack.

The bottled up rage is crystal clear on his face. As clear as Lecter's indifference for it. "Zeller, Price. Tell me what you found."

End of discussion. Defeated, Crawford enters the room to center his attention on something else. Lecter excuses himself and walks away from the scene with the excuse of bringing Will something to drink. Beverly is the only one to stay with him to give him a full inspection.

"Are you okay? Are you sure is safe for you to come back?"

"I'm fine. This has happened before." He takes a step away from her touch.

"But not too long. We used to bring you back to life before the minute. Doctor Lecter stepped and told us not interfere, that's why you were down there for a long time." Her hands go into her lab coat pockets, and with a softer voice she whispers: "Besides, this only happens when you are about to kill someone."

"And you think this one doesn't deserve it?" Will says sardonic.

She thinks about her answer with intensity. "You know. I'm half blind, and I am half deaf. For a matter of fact, I don't know where the bullet came from."

He chuckles before staying in complete silence again. Beverly takes his forearm and forces him to walk away from the bin, refusing to stay any minute longer smelling Will's vomit.

"So, The Midnight Ripper, huh?"

"If they're not careful they'll make <u>him</u> an Idol." He shrugs indifferently.

"Oh, common. Don't bring me that. We both know that a name like that could only come from you little head."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Is classy, elegant. I bet he'll be happy about it."

He hopes <u>he</u> is. Will had to break all his rules to give <u>him</u> a name and he won't take <u>his</u> silence for an answer.

"I was tired of <u>*him*</u> having the name of my character. It felt... gross."

“*I knew it*. A little low coming from you. To talk with Lounds. But whatever works, I guess.”

Silence.

“If I am God. And he is, by consequence, the devil... where is Michael?”

Michael arrived at his house at 1 am. She very subtly knocked on the door to wake the dogs, and the dogs woke Will.

Michael didn’t come from Heaven in fancy wings. She came in a little semi new blue beetle. She didn’t bring a majestic scroll full of knowledge about God, peace and love. She brought a chronogram of people and places that she visited in the last week. And she definitely didn’t come with a mighty sword in her hand. She came with two patches: one being nicotine and the other being caffeine.

Michael doesn’t have wonderful golden curly hair, nor a penetrating stare and the strength of hundred man. Michael looks bad, tired. Already-waiting-for-death tired. Her short brown hair is a mess, and her pale-sick skin only highlights the bags under her eyes. Crooked lips, dry eyes.

Michael stayed on his house the whole night.

Waking up early always felt good. But today it felt like nothing on Earth.

It is like waking up in Eden for the first time, encountering that bright light that was condemned to be called Sun by the human race, but for him… it is Will. Will, his beautiful star king, a great entity made to guide humanity and the planets into their destruction once they get swallowed by a black hole.

Sometimes, it is hard for him to know who or what is the black hole. If it is him waiting for Will and His wonderful attraction towards Hannibal’s void, or, if it is something unknown that would transform them into something else, unknown to the conscience and far from being understood. If he is the black hole, he is ready to change Will; if he is the moon, he is ready to die with Will.

The options always lead to the same conclusion. Them being together. And is quite delicious to think that no matter what, they will find the way to fuse.

In another world, another universe, perhaps, there is someone playing with the strings of faith, changing them, transforming them, conjoining, fusing, stretching, trying, and nodding everything into the right place so no one and nothing could ever tear them apart. Nor God, nor death could interfere between them.

His morning started as usual. He went out for a run, came back home, he did more exercise. He ran a bath, and then came the exceptionally perfected skincare routine. For breakfast he

had bacon, eggs, a toast with avocado, and coffee. He got dressed and he went to work. He likes routine.

And he likes to imagine how Will would behave in His daily life. What are His routines, what He usually eats, how would they mix their routines together… what precious images can the mind create when it is bursting with love.

A knock on his door takes him out of his daydreams. He isn't the type of man to get lost in his imagination while working or resting, but the irresistible Will has made a mess out of him and now he can't avoid dreaming about Him in an ivory tower writing poems and throwing arrows into the hearts of men.

Hannibal stands up and walks towards the door, letting the smell of industrialized cherry flow into his office. He smiles at the little creature that stands up before him.

"Alana. Is a pleasure to see you." He greets her before giving her a soft kiss in her cheek.

She doesn't smell like Will. She smells like vanilla and oak-tree, baby powder and honey. Margot and her child. Someone has been playing house. It is somehow disappointing, yet he also feels relieved that she didn't spend the night with Will. In other news, it is also refreshing to smell their colognes mixing so well together. Meant for each other.

"The pleasure is mine; I was asked to come here." She says cheerfully. "I expected you to be occupied with your work at the FBI and all the movements you had to make in your agenda, I didn't think you would receive me here."

Alana walks in after handling him her purse and her umbrella. The little drops of water remaining on it make their way down to the tip of the umbrella to then fall into his floor. She was considerate enough to shake it before entering, but it still has made it statement that it won't dry no matter what. Hannibal is so happy to even care properly about it.

She sits on one of the couches, ignoring the divan where they usually used to sit before she got married and where they sat once her love for Will began to decay. This is something new. And it might be Margot, or it might be Will, but she is showing the clear need to stay away from him. Their past together is something that still haunts her, apparently. He never corresponded those feelings, though, despite her being beautiful and smart and the perfect woman for Hannibal's fake suit, she is still human. There is no love in her for him, at least not something that could feel real.

He walks towards his personal hidden cava of wines and retrieves two cups along with a bottle. White, in celebration.

"I'm afraid I brought you here to distract myself from work." He pours the wine in her glass. She drinks almost immediately. "And to discuss a few aspects about Will."

Her eyes travel slowly from her glass to his face, analyzing the little to no emotion that he is showing. It is all professional and calm, the type of face used for business rather than proper relaxation. She is cautious when she talks.

“Is there something wrong with him?”

“Not at all. Is just a simple request, really, in order to help him be comfortable around me. The FBI has asked me to assist Him as His therapist and I think it would be better for Him if He is unknown of our relationship as friends.”

“Oh! Right. I don’t see why not, but wouldn’t that be unethical anyway? To have him working with a close friend of his wife?”

“If we don’t talk about Him or about us in front of Him, then it doesn’t have to be unethical. We are just two strangers worried about the same man.” They drink at the same time.

The expression on her face tells him that she isn’t completely sure about the deal, but she is eager to participate if that means taking care of good old Willy.

“Have you met him yet?”

“Yes. I must say that He is delightful.” He drinks again, adding with the swallow a memory of Will’s violence towards the cadaver back on the examination room. It sweetens the wine. “I remembered all the good things you said about Him before I met Him. And now I understand why you still have professional curiosity about Him.”

She doesn’t deny it nor complains about the comment.

Alana used to talk about Will sometimes, avoiding some topics and leaning to talk about others that didn’t compromise her status as His friend or His lover. She did admit having professional curiosity for Him, but she never said much about it, and for that, Hannibal is glad and disappointed. Had he known before handed the wonderful mind Will had, he might had entered in His life sooner. But keeping Him a secret also has its good aspects, for starters, Hannibal can appreciate His mind in a much personal way, take the envelope around His head with tender love and rejoice in the results of a carefully done job.

“And even out of the professional instances, Will still has a lot to offer as an individual. He is energetic when He talks, and He is rough when He does it, but I do appreciate the sincerity of His severity. Will tends to adopt the cadence of one’s speech when He talks, that is why I assume that is easy to talk with Him if one can assume His point of view. For a man who often lives in other’s minds, the least we can do is live in His.”

“How much did you talk?” She finds his words odd and hard to believe.

“A lot, even to my surprise. But it was a refreshing conversation. Is good that we both dislike boring people or else we wouldn’t have gone along. We had breakfast together, and I must say that nothing could have prepared me for the intensity of His words.”

Will, as someone told him, is not the type of man to talk a lot because people don’t talk to Him enough. Or because they are not willing to listen. Or because He is very private about personal issues. Either way, Hannibal has been part of a phase of Him that shows His willingness to accept His own voice If someone else accepts it. Hannibal will be the one

giving Him the microphone, and he will listen to everything He has to say even if it is wrong. Because it is Will. And Will matters.

“What He has is pure empathy.” He says after another sip of wine. “And projection. He can assume your point of view, or mine—and maybe some other points of view that scare Him. It’s an uncomfortable gift, Alana. Perception’s a tool that’s pointed on both ends.”

“Then what are you proposing as your intervention plan.”

“It isn’t an intervention with the purpose of changing Him. All He needs is assurance, accompaniment, and comfort after experiencing the life of a murderer or any other who might represent an issue. Changing Him won't change anything. He will find a way to return to the darkness.”

Unless, of course, the change means submerging Him into the darkness, teaching Him to appreciate it rather than running away from it. With His empathy turned off, He won’t have to live in other world that isn’t His.

“He needs someone to remind Him who He is after talking with the devil.”

A glimpse of guilt crosses Alana’s face, yet it vanishes as soon as it comes.

“Beverly told me Will almost strangled a cadaver last week. Is there any reason why he did that?”

She doesn’t believe Will needs a soft hand. Not when the devil in question is already changing Will into an intoxicating darkness. But it will be useful if the devil in question is the same giving Him therapy. Will already finds the Midnight Ripper attractive–the idea of Him loving his work, the name that comes with the art, the knowledge that Will could already see something wrong with Him and is still okay with Hannibal being around Him… it sends shivers through His body–He only needs time to find Hannibal as His only point of support. And with Alana having Margot as her lover, it would be easier to tear them apart.

He knows they aren’t in love anymore, but they fake it for the sake of commodity. She uses Him, and He uses her. Even so, they are incapable of seeing each other as something more than a patient and a therapist who doesn’t really work professionally.

“Not any that we might have discussed. He didn’t want to talk about it, and I didn’t push Him any further. And I’m afraid that if He ever tells me, I wouldn’t share a word with you about it since it would be in my office as His official therapist.”

“Are you planning on giving him any medication?”

For what? To make Him numb and sleepy? To keep Him lost in His mind? To make Him distant from the rest of the world? It might have helped to make Him an addict to psychiatric medicine and then cut the doses administration so that Will crawled on His knees for more. In another life, perhaps. In this life, all he needs is to keep Him awake and functioning. His mind is too precious to be turned off.

“Why should I? Will has a tendency for dependency, whether it is in alcohol, drugs, people, or others. To give Him something more potent than His usual addictions could be dangerous, and I don’t have any diagnosis by the moment that can indicate otherwise.”

“Won’t help either now that he is working again, I suppose. Jack will push him even harder just to keep him looking, and it will end up being a mess. The Ripper, the medication, Jack… it would only bring him to the edge faster.”

Maybe he was wrong about the medication…

“You are right. We only want what is best for Him, Alana. We might need to find new ways to help Him go through it.”

One of these new ways consists on having dinner with Him… and Beverly and Brian and James. But mainly with Will.

Hannibal arrives early to Beverly’s house. He is a man who prefers to invite people over to his house to cook for them. He knows his kitchen and his ingredients as well as he knows the palm of his hand, notwithstanding, Beverly is aware of this too. All he has to do, she told him, is to bring the ingredients and she will help him as his *commis de cuisine.* Her workplace might not be as big as his kitchen, but it is enough to turn it into a culinary paradise.

She opens the door with a beaming smile in her face, moving aside to let him into her house.

He has always admired her sense of decoration. In no world could she ever have a boring room; everything is pristine, elegant, sophisticated and youthful. She likes detailed decorations and colorful ornaments that contrast with the room’s white walls, paintings are also an important part of her exhibition of wonders. Whilst Hannibal preferences fall into baroque and romanticism, Beverly prefers impressionism and art deco. Cheerful like her.

“Welcome to my humble house, Doctor Lecter.”

“Is always a pleasure to be invited into your home, Agent Katz.”

She chuckles. They walk towards the kitchen, where Beverly helps him to unpack everything that he brought: knives, utensils, vegetables, sauces, wine, fruits, and meat. And extraordinary hunt, and a hard one to catch. All the animals he has killed have been well preserved, and tonight, they will be elevated into one of the greatest forms of art. She looks curiously at the packages of meat before putting them into her fridge until they are ready to use them.

“What are we cooking, Doc?”

“We’ll start with sautéed liver and apple salad with blackberry dressing; then we’ll be having lung and loins tarts with a spicy cheese sauce. As the main dish, we’ll have a braise pork leg. The dessert is all yours.”

Her smile widens as he speaks, and a sigh of conformity and delight comes out of her chest. When she opens them, all he can see is expectation and hunger. She bows her head, as if telling him that she is ready to follow his orders.

“Tell me then, chef. What shall I do?”

“Wash the vegetables while I prepare the tarts shells. After that, I expect you to mince the meat while I prepare the sauces, and while I get the pork ready, you can begin the preparations for dessert.”

“Yes, chef!”

It is nice to work with people like Beverly, always eager to follow instructions with extra care and achieve perfection. She takes the care she puts into her work into her cooking, always seeking to have all aspects under control so her skills can be reflected in her cooking. The first time she cooked for him, he didn’t expect much, for that he was horribly sorry. He underestimated her.

In the meantime that they had known each other, they had been exchanging recipes and tips to mutually improve.

Beverly is not only good as an agent or a colleague, but she is also good in the kitchen. And a good friend. At the watchers eyes, it could be easy to interpret their relationship as something close and intimate, but Beverly lacks something important to make that statement true: the attraction. And Hannibal lacks something even more important: the feelings.

So, they were a good duo. No love, no interest, no proximity, only two passionate souls who enjoyed cooking together.

“Will is on his way here.” She informs him. “He always arrives before Jimmy or Brian. Is like he needs time to adjust before he is introduced abruptly into any group even if he has known them for years.”

“As expected. He needs to know he won’t be excluded if he is late.”

“I didn’t tell him you would be here, tho.”

Hannibal leaves the dough unattended so he can turn to look at Beverly. She keeps her eyes on the vegetables and the water running over them and her hands, she does know he is looking at her. For some unknown reason, Beverly always knows when he is looking at her. It might be her fight or flight response or that he has a recognizable stare that only she can feel, like she knows he is a magnet luring prey.

“Why not telling him if he needs to have his ambiance under control?”

“Because I am curious about his reaction.” She answers in a dead and monotonous voice. It is replaced by a cheerful tone when she is finally done washing her vegetables. “And because he likes you. I have never heard him talk so much about someone since he met Alana. Which is good if you are going to be his therapist.”

“I don’t think I’ll be his official therapist for too long. Will is convinced that my intentions towards him might be too friendly and that they might interfere with a proper diagnosis.”

Beverly walks to the other side of the aisle that Hannibal has left clean for her to work. She places a cutting board on it and three containers where she will be putting the chopped vegetables according to the recipes and the type of cuts that she makes.

“And he is right. Will is too perceptible about this kind of things. Don’t pressure him into liking you or into telling you his biggest secrets, or else. He might run away. If you want a tip, talk about anything that isn’t him when he starts feeling nervous. Keep his mind distracted. Diving too far into his subconscious won’t be good for either of you.”

“Like the Midnight Ripper?” Hannibal leaves the dough into a bowl to chill. Timer set at 30 minutes before he kneads it again.

Her eyes shot up from the cutting board. She looks at him from head to toes–to torso, to be frank–then she shrugs.

“Whatever helps. But don’t go deep on it, or he’ll get obsessed over it. Already happened to us once before he got dismissed.”

“Oh?” His curiosity itches like a poison ivy.

“Yeah. He only ate, drank and slept on the examination room, when he wasn’t there he would spent all nights going through records, old cases, files. He went as far to recreate the crime scene with a dummy. When I arrived at his house that night, I saw it.” Her hands stop moving, Beverly looks at something that only she can see. There are no trace of emotions in her face. “The dummy had been mutilated and abused by him for an entire day before he hang it on the entrance of his house. I found him *«staring»* up at it while he was sitting on the snow. His eyelids burned by the cold, his lips in a pale blue color, his fingers almost purple… he had his eyes closed, and by God, I am thankful for that. By his state, I deduced that he spent a long time there, and his corneas would have frozen under the cold by that point.”

Hannibal closes his eyes to capture the perfect image of Will. He knows what case she is talking about, and it takes minimum effort to replace the dummy with a real person crucified in Will’s porch. The blood rolling down the body and staining the white snow with its filthy drops. Will, covered in blood and sweat after a good execution.

Pride floods Hannibal’s chest. The image of destruction looks divine and diabolic.

The Will of his imagination turns to look at him, the redness around His eyes does nothing but to pop out the intense blue color of His irises, and the pale skin shows the blue and purple veins traveling around His body like roots of a tree growing out of Him; He has an empty gaze and the sound of a faraway song decaying due to the damage is being played somewhere. Everything on the scenario screams ‘run,’ but even so, Hannibal is willing to accept his faith.

He opens his eyes before Will can jump and attack him.

“Was Alana there with Him?” Hannibal walks around to retrieve the things he will be using for the sauces. Pans, blender spoons, and ingredients. Everything is in place for easy access.

“No, she was away. Like always. So I took him here. I was happy once I heard him sing when he finally recovered his consciousness. Then he passed out again. That repeated all the way to my apartment.” She wakes up from her dreams too. The sound of her knife cutting the scallops returns. “He did find the murderer after that. His bullet did, too.”

“Was that one of the cases that were used against him?”

“Yes. The murderer didn’t go down without a good fight, and the official papers don’t tell that the murderer had a bite on their left cheek. When they questioned him about it, Will responded that he bit them in self-defense. When they asked about the chunk of meat, he didn’t answer. Jack, Jimmy, Brian, and I are the only ones out of the committee who know about it and who worked in the case so no one could know that Will ate it.”

“And now I know about it.”

“You don’t count, Doc. You are his therapist. Sooner or later, you would’ve found out. Whether it was because of one of us or because of Jack.”

“Does Jack know about the dummy in Will’s house?”

“What dummy?” She says sarcastically. “Will only used the power of deduction and imagination. If there was ever a dummy, then I didn’t see it.”

“Of course. His brilliant mind wouldn’t require Him to take extreme measurements to resolve a case. What a cunning boy.”

A knock to the door interrupts them both. Beverly checks the clock on the bar of her kitchen. She cleans her hands with a clean towel before she walks out of the kitchen towards the door. The smell of dogs, pines and hideous aftershave enter into the apartment. This time, the smell is accompanied by something else, something acid.

He only needs to turn to look at the bags under Will’s eyes. They give Him an angry aspect, like He is permanently annoyed with everything going around Him. Beverly doesn’t mention it when she greets Him. Will can barely give her a proper smile before coming into the apartment.

It’s been a month since they exchanged letters, a month since Anthony, a month without seeing each other under the excuse of giving Will His own time to heal properly before going into therapy. Hannibal expected to see Him recovered, healthier. This is a surprise.

Will is conducted to the kitchen bar to sit on one of the stools. He doesn’t acknowledge Hannibal until He is sitting. His eyes are covered by a scowl.

“Doctor Lecter?” His voice is raspy as always.

“Good night, Will. Was Your trip well?”

“What are you doing here?” Hannibal doesn’t get mad for having his question dodged.

“Beverly invited me to have dinner with Your team. I came early to help her cooking.”

“Well, not really. I’m the one assisting the chef.” She scoffs. “He has more experience than I have, so I might as well do my best to work with him.” She sounds happy. The type of happiness that only Will can bring.

Hannibal, however, is incapable of taking his eyes out of Will and the absent stare that sometimes takes over Him. The timer sounds, and he leaves the stove to return to the dough.

“Keep an eye on the stove, Miss Katz. Is in low flame, but I don’t want it to burn.”

“Yes, chef.”

Hannibal looks at Will again, only to find that Will is already looking at him. His heart skips a beat; Will has the appearance of the man from his imagination, the one from the tale that Beverly was talking about. What he didn’t take into consideration when he was imagining is that Will wasn’t completely emotionless. He has hunger darkening His eyes.

He has hunter eyes and a gun loaded, ready to shoot somewhere. He aims for the head.

The trance ends, and Will is back to be Will. His body relaxes.

“If I had known you’d be here I would have brought something. But it is okay, I guess. Is good to see you again, Doctor.”

“Is good to see You too, Will. Have You been sleeping well?”

The question seems to disturb Him a little.

“Not actually, no. Nothing to worry about, happens at the end of some cases.”

“Of course is something to worry about, Will. Not having a healthy sleeping schedule will only give him more power over Your mind.” Hannibal takes the dough to the fridge.

Then he walks to the cupboard where he knows Beverly keeps her teas. It is good she has dry ingredients rather than tea bags; he has the option to make his own creations. Chamomile, lavender, cinnamon, jasmine. He pours water into an electric kettle before placing it onto its base to warm up the water.

“Who?” Will asks with His distinctive frown decorating His forehead. Hannibal has to contain the need to smooth His wrinkles, to touch His face and brush His hair in order to drive the tiredness away.

To comfort.

“Your murderer.”

‘But there is where I want <u>him</u>. How am I supposed to catch <u>him</u> if I can’t see <u>him</u>? <u>He</u> already has power in my mind.’

Will gives him a jagged nod, slow and small. He flicks his wrist, resting importance in Hannibal’s words. “Is okay, Doctor. Really.”

“I defer.”

Beverly has already turned off the stove and placed the pans aside. She is now taking the meat out of the fridge to begin her bloody work. Mince the meat. She has also taken out the pork, already cut in big pieces to take the calf’s shape out of it. Hannibal takes out the pan that he will be using to seal the meat.

“We want You here in the real world, Will. Not in the world where only You and him exist. Otherwise, You’ll end up diving alone.”

“I always dive alone.” He is getting irritated. Not unlikely, but He is harsher than usual.

“And that is a problem. If there is no one on the boat to give You a hand so You can stay away from the water when the current gets worse, You’ll end up adrift and alone. You’ll die of starvation.”

Will massages His face and eyes with violence. The glance that He gives to Hannibal is a warning. *«Mind your business»*, it tells him. The water is ready, Hannibal washes his hands before taking a cup and a tea strainer where he places the ingredients for the tea. The water is poured, and the tea has to wait a bit before it can be served.

“How are the kids?” Beverly comes into the conversation–if that back and forward can be called conversation–avoiding it from going any further.

Will takes His time to comprehend what she said. The change of topic seems to relax Him more and He looks more alive.

“They are okay. I found a new one. Winston. He is cute. Seemed like someone tied him to something for a long time before he got to free himself. He was full of fleas when I took him home, and I had to shave some parts of his fur because he was full of nods and dirt and blood. He is doing better now.”

“Oh, you have some photos?” Beverly walks towards Him to look at the new acquisition.

Hannibal takes the cup of tea to Him. “Honey or sugar?”

“Honey, please.” Now that His mind is distracted in something He loves, He is more docile and cooperative.

The rest of the night goes like that. As soon as Brian and Jimmy arrive, Will leaves His place on the kitchen bar to sit on one of the bean coaches; He falls asleep until dinner is ready.

Even sleeping, He has a frown on His face that disappears when He recognizes Beverly waking Him up. He still looks angry about it, nonetheless.

They sit at the table, Hannibal at the top, Will by his right, Beverly by his left, Jimmy next to her and Brian in front of Jimmy, next to Will.

Hannibal has been waiting a long time for this. To see Will feeding over the meat of his hunts and savoring the taste of human meat. He takes the first bite before anyone else, uncaring of the way the rest stand expectantly to see His reaction.

He chews the liver a couple of times before letting a pleasant sigh out of His nose. The rest begins to eat after that, giving the same reaction to the soft meat and the flavor of the blackberry sauce.

“Have you started writing the third book, Will?”

Everyone on the table turn to look at Brian before their eyes travel to Will, who seems to be still half asleep. To Hannibal, He looks handsome like that, too. Messy hair, tired eyes, His life going into ruin… He looks pretty suffering. The question is, why is He suffering?

Will drinks His whole glass of wine before answering.

“They might cancel it. The FBI. It wouldn’t be good to give him more things to use as an inspiration.”

“Wouldn’t that put him into rage?” Hannibal asks Him innocently.

Will looks at him. “Who cares? He has shown that he doesn’t need my book to find inspiration to create his own killings. All he needs is me.”

The words are sweet as honey. And so true. For Will is the tidal force that impulses Hannibal’s life. He is the pure air that comes from the mountains and the sound of the birds composing melodies for him to delight. All he needs is Will. And all Will needs is him. There is no greater man than the one capable of stealing hearts, helping the weak, and fighting honorable causes; there is no greater man than the one that has too much humanity in His life to be even considered real.

“Have they told you if there has been any progression with the lists of suspects?”

Will shakes His head. “I know nothing else from what you do. They say that no matter what, they always get into a dead end. Gathering personal information and stalking people these days is easier than before, so he can be anyone. And now that he is going into his hiatus period, there is no way to keep track of him.”

He sounds disappointed. Sad. Frustrated.

“Well, we can at least thank him for leaving You at peace a couple of months. You won’t have to see another crime scene, and all that is left is for You to relax.” Hannibal wins an offended glance from Will. The rest nod in agreement.

“You can go on vacation.” Jimmy follows the suggestion. “Take your dogs with you and leave the country. Is not like he is going to kill in these days.”

“What if he does?” *Is that hope in his voice?* “I can’t be away if he chooses to break his M.O. again. I won’t be of any use if I’m away.”

Hannibal stands up to take everyone’s empty plates. The conversation continues without him.

“You can’t spend your whole life running behind a ghost, Will. Look what it did to Jack.” Hannibal hears Brian say. “You wouldn’t want to have your own Miriam Lass, would you?”

The man doesn’t reply. Hannibal returns with the tarts, and the process repeats. Everyone waits for Will to eat first. The hungry thing comes alive with the flavors that dance on his tongue, and the rest eats after that. Hannibal recognizes that Will is doing everything on His power to avoid eating fast and desperately, like this is His first meal in ages.

“Think about Alana. If you can’t do it for yourself, then do it for her.” Beverly offers Him a soft smile. Will keeps His face stoic.

“Alana will be fine. She is always with Margot, and Margot has the best security of the world in her mansion. If she can be safe somewhere, then it is at Margot’s. And she can always return home with her parents. She’ll be safe away.”

“From You or from him?” Hannibal asks him. Will shrugs. He has a sardonic smile on His face when He does it.

“Both, I suppose.” He drinks the glass of wine empty. He pours more. The glass gets empty again, and Hannibal has to recognize that He has talent to transform an expensive wine into a cheap shot of tequila in some cheap and dirty bar with strippers passed 3 A.M.

No one looks as amused as him.

“I have a good bottle of whiskey.” Beverly is the siren that Will is willing to follow. Her voice and the cadence of her words are magical and tempting. “Neat or on the rocks?”

“Neat.” He answers happily.

She doesn’t need to be told twice before she stands up in a hurry for some glasses and the bottle. Hannibal follows her to prepare the third course of the meal.

“I hope you don’t get mad about drinking whiskey with your perfect dinner, Doctor. But our boy needs it.”

“Not at all. Whatever gets Him happy. Just don’t get Him drunk before dessert.”

Beverly laughs maliciously as she walks away. Is not a promise.

Will is drunk by the time dessert is served.

Everyone is cheering him up while he does a stupid dance in the middle of the living room with Beverly by his side. He is breathless and exhausted, but he can't stop the feeling of excitement that comes from drinking and having a fucking good meal after days of starving and studying. After a month of writing and driving to the warehouse. This is what life should feel like, a drinking party after a bad break-up, a night of stupid actions careless of what others think about him.

Power.

He feels like God, ruler of the world, the Lamb partying before battle. Enjoying his last days of life before it is consumed again by the cruel reality: he hasn't written.

Neither of them has, in reality But he expected something, anything from finally naming him. A SIMPLE THANK YOU WOULD'VE BEEN GREAT! Of course, he doesn't know Will was the one to name him, but he could have made a fuss about it. Will would have replied almost proudly about him being the master mind.

He wanted to talk about how It felt to be inside him when he killed Anthony. How deathless and ecstatic he felt when his love burned him whilst he was in both Anthony and his shoes. About how he *worshipped*. And about how mad he still is with him from bringing a forgotten feeling back to his life.

The thrill of the first kill. The adrenaline running over his body when he smelt blood. The images of his teeth wrapping around the meat. The animal impulses that always came after staring at his little accidents for a long time.

He is damaging him. And is harder and harder for him to deny that he isn't in love with that darkness. And it scares him. Because not only he is aware of the power that drove him through the blood shed of the innocent–and the not so innocent–people, but he is also aware of how love looks in his eyes. If only he could keep the good job and make the rest of the murders the same way he does the special ones, if only he could drug him with every new victim. Pamper him.

Doesn't he deserve to be loved correctly? And once they are next to each other, he will kill them both. The last remains of his humanity bringing justice to the world before he falls into madness and fuses with him in an eternal embrace.

Him. His creation. His taste of power and blood. His last victim.

On a normal day, none of these thoughts could be admitted so freely. They would be replaced by words about justice, him not being a monster, and how the lives of others were more important than his. But now, drunk, sleepless, and frantic, nothing matters anymore.

Alcohol eases the guilt. It eases his need to have control over his impulses. And Will is free.

"Are the two dancers ready for dessert?" Hannibal gets their attention as he walks out of the kitchen with slices of salted caramel chocolate tart.

Will has to wait patiently for the dizziness on his body to leave before him and Beverly make a triumphant and dumb walk to the table. Hannibal catches him by the waist after stumbling a bit when Beverly leaves his embrace. The grip is strong and firm; he is too close.

It is a different kind of touch from the one Beverly and Alana usually give him.

“Sorry, Doc.” He says between dumb giggles.

“I would be thanking if a hot man like the doc here was helping me like that.” Beverly jokes. “He is too darn strong for a psychiatrist.”

“I bet the doc carries his lovers all the way into the room.” Jimmy raises his glass towards Hannibal, a toast. And a compliment. “There is where all the muscle comes from.”

Hannibal smiles widely. Will can see the sharp fangs coming into scene. “You are not wrong. I like to take good care of what I’m about to eat.”

The room burst into laughter. Will looks down to his dish, the slice of tart seems to be dancing around and his hands are too clumsy to even grab the spoon correctly.

“Do you also feed them by hand? Because I’m having trouble with mine.”

“You flirt when you drink?” Brian sounds amused by his behavior.

“Only when I’m happy.”

“I’ll only feed you with my bare fingers if you go to bed with me.”

“The doctor is a flirter, too!” Jimmy cheers and high-fives Beverly. The trio laughs.

“Oh, no, Doc. You came into my life too late. I’m a married man.”

“Don’t believe shit of what he says.” Beverly tells Hannibal. “Bullshit, I tell ya. Bull-shit.”

“Beverly, you aren’t the right one to talk about other people’s love life.” Brian ends the rum on his glass and serves two extra portions for both him and Will. “You’ve never been in a relationship.”

“Coaches don’t play.” She shrugs.

“I’m still married.”

“Nah.” The collective disagreement makes him laugh.

“Is a lavender marriage at this point.” Jimmy tells Hannibal, who only looks more and more interested in their conversation and Will than before.

“Fuck you.”

“No, Will. Please, let him finish. It might be important for our next session.”

“This doesn’t feel like therapy. Is more like a lame, tasteless intervention group. All of you desperately try to save the poor addict before he can add more morphine to his veins.” He speaks slowly and steadily, spitting venom with every word. His cheerful expression fading away with every passing second. “Not seeing that I’m doing y’all a favor by taking it rather than using ecstasy.”

“Sedation over exhilaration.” Hannibal tells him. Will does nothing but look him on the eyes. Challenge. “Who are you trying to keep asleep, Will?”

No one says anything else. The entire table is expectant of the answer–if there is one–they are even containing their breath as they wait for Will to fight and bite back. He can feel the asphyxiating air surrounding them like Sulphur trying to melt their lungs; it is staggering, strong. A feeling not only directed towards Hannibal but towards each and every one sitting at the table who couldn’t keep their mouth shut.

But he knows them better, and they know him. More important, Beverly isn’t Hannibal and by consequence her words don’t affect him as much.

Hannibal is not like Beverly; the soft-spoken and always worried Beverly; the altruistic and humble and human Beverly. Hannibal is, in Will’s words, shameless, arrogant, hasty, and good at tasting Will’s boundaries. Since the moment Will met him, he knew that Hannibal would represent a rock on his shoe; he is polite enough to not force an answer out of him but his own curiosity will always be waiting for any kind of response–psychical or otherwise–that can tell him if his words pinched a nerve.

And that is a problem with people like Hannibal. People who never stop seeing Will as a project and the perfect study subject. If Will were him, he would have repudiated Hannibal for being rude.

He tries to imagine what kind of face he would be putting when standing right next to a man like Hannibal. What would be the border between rudeness and acceptable behavior?

Would he kill Hannibal for him?

“The tart is delicious, Doctor Lecter. Is amazing that a man like you is still single.” Brian tries to break the cold silence. His voice hesitates as he tries to guess if it is a bold move.

“I’m afraid I wasn’t the master mind behind this dish.” Hannibal sounds as calm and controlled as ever. The blank expression on his face is nothing but annoying. Although, blank is a hard word to use considering the slight smirk full of pride that came from the praise. It is directed towards Beverly. “Miss Katz is an excellent cook herself, and she has a good hand when it comes to desserts and sweets. Letting her bake the tart is a price for being an exceptional assistant and as a thanks for letting me use the kitchen.”

“Always satisfying your whims, Doc.” She is calm as him.

Will hadn’t touched his slice. The previous mood drove the hunger away, and now all he can think about is him again. And that saddens him.

“I lost my appetite.” He whispers, sliding the plate away from him. “Sorry.”

“Oh, darling.” *Darling, darling, darling, darling*… “No need to be. I’ll keep it on the freezer until you are ready to eat, and you know that you can always come back to eat anything you want.”

Her soothing tone is a caress on his back. Her way to comfort without touching. To ask for forgiveness without saying it.

He nods slowly. Will pours more rum into his glass to drink it is small sips.

“Can we also come to eat more? For us to come and eat in your house is like a miracle!” Jimmy puts the last bit of tart in his mouth before swallowing it down with the wine.

Only him and the doctor are the ones drinking wine. The rest are at the point of being uncaring about what it is as long as it is alcohol.

“Will is my brother. My precious someone. My best friend. He has special treatment.” She giggles. “But if you are willing to pay for all the catering…”

“Is not fair that Will is the only one eating like a king!”

“He cooks like a king, too! And it is not like we eat like this every time he comes. We like it hot and ready to go.” She laughs at her own joke. “You guys should force him to cook for you. Meat always tastes like heaven when he is the one touching it.”

“I don’t know how I would feel about Will touching my meat.” Brian whispers.

“I won’t touch anyone’s meat.” A collective sigh of deception come to his ears. He laughs. He is still annoyed about the situation going in his head, but he laughs. “As a matter of fact, the sexual assault is over. I need to go home before my dogs destroy the couch.”

“Will, you can’t even walk. Why don’t you stay here for the night?” Beverly tells him while he tries to stand up.

Will stumbles in response to her words. Everyone reaches a hand in a failed act to catch him; he doesn’t fall anyway.

“I don’t want to bother you."

"You will never do that, darling."

Darling feels sick. Darling is prohibited. Darling isn’t hers. Darling. Darling. Darling. Him and his stupid need to call him darling, dear, my dear, my love, my Will. He takes him high, building wax wings for him to use, and just when he is in the top, he is the one burning them down again so Will can never leave him.

Then hate returns, only to be blinded by anxiety, obsession, and then depression once again. Is pavlovian.

Will sits back on his chair, both hands holding his head as he thinks: *'One of you will betray me. Not tonight.'*

Or maybe: *'One of you is already betraying me.'*

One of you is telling him about who I am, about what you saw and what you heard. One of you is whispering my secrets in his ear and is helping him build a wonderland full of emotions that you know I'm addicted to. One of you is under Michael's eye but she won't tell me until it is wise.

And when that day comes, shall mercy or gratitude come into your hands. And no matter whichever it is, *hop, hop, hop away.*

He does care about the victims. He does not care about him. Victims say thank you, and then they turn their back to carry on with their lives. He will say thank you and stay. Solitude for the well of a greater good is better than companionship destined to destruction. And that saddens him, too.

"I'll stay. The bean chairs are okay, I won't be sleeping a lot anyway." He sighs resigned.

Beverly nods cheerfully. "It's settled then. There is a free room for anyone else who wants to stay."

"That sounds tempting but I do need to get home." Brian stands up. Jimmy follows him.

"I'll call an Uber for the both of us." He helps his friend by hugging his waist and his shoulder. To Hannibal he says: "Doctor, if it isn't much trouble, would you mind helping me with this one? He can be really bothersome when he is drunk."

"Your mom is drunk."

"I come from a family of alcoholics, so she might be." Jimmy chuckles. "You'll stay at my house, buddy. So, Doctor?"

"Of course. Two conscious alcoholics are better than one."

Hannibal stands up and walks towards them, hugging Brian in the same way to keep him from falling.

"Miss Katz, I'm really sorry for letting you clean the table, but duty calls."

"Is alright. Willy and I will clean. Just get them to their car safely." She swipes the conversion with a wrist movement. "Would you like to stay or is someone picking you up, Doctor?"

"My car is in here. As much as I would want my daughter to come and pick me up, she is already back in France. I'll be staying with you if it isn't a problem."

"Sure thing. Tell me when you are home."

Both Jimmy and Brian nod. They wish them a save trip as they thank Beverly for the food and the alcohol. They disappear behind the door.

“Does he know about you and Alana?” Jimmy asks once they are in the elevator.

“No.” He answers. “I told her not to say a word if we want to help him. Or else he won’t be comfortable around me.”

“I don’t think he was too comfortable around you anyway.” Brian points out. His slurry words are something Hannibal can’t disagree with.

“We might have been too harsh with him. You need to learn how to talk and behave around Will. And it was Beverly’s fault. She knows she shouldn’t bring those types of things into the table.”

“Just keep Alana away from conversation. Win his heart with books and music.”

Hannibal listens attentively to everything the duo has to say. He knows better than interrupt them when they are starting a complementary conversation. Both of them are good at exposing secrets if they have each other to end their sentences. How beautiful is love.

“Talk about the Midnight Ripper. Or any other murderer. That helps to make him open up since he feels that the attention isn’t on him.”

The doors open and the three of them walk out in a more steady and controlled pace than the one they were showing on the apartment. Yet, they are still too drunk to have full control of their thoughts.

Which is good, because that means they don’t have any boundaries that could tell them to stop talking about Will.

“And respect his goddamn boundaries!” Brian shouts. “Don’t be intrusive. We know you are an opposite pole to him so find something you two share in common.”

“How do I win His mind?” He asks after they stay in silence.

The fresh air welcomes them once they walk out of the building. By fresh, it isn’t necessarily clean, but he can’t complain about anything, not when the essence of Will is impregnated to his clothes by the way he held Him earlier to help Him from falling.

In that moment, he felt a warm rush of excitement running through his fingers. And when Will stared at him with murderous eyes? Glory. Never could he ever guessed that such vile and rude man could bring him to his knees with only a frown. He knows Will finds him annoying and is so much better when He is mad at him than when He is actively ignoring him.

He almost felt the punch In the face after the conversion about Alana started. He wished it happened.

“Is hard to tell. Neither Beverly is that close to him. She knows how to win his affection and how to make him feel validation, but no matter what, he will never talk about the things he sees.” Jimmy answers first.

“Wrong. He does talk about what he sees. He doesn’t talk about *what he sees*. He can rattle about what he sees in us, but he won’t talk about what he sees on himself.”

“If you ever find him with his sight lost, is because he is seeing something.”

“Not like schizophrenia. Just daydreams.” Jimmy nods at Brian’s response. “When he started working with us it didn’t happen as much. The trances were… centric on the case and that was all. But now…”

“Now…” Jimmy echoes. “Now…”

“Now that he has a taste for blood.”

“We don’t talk about that. We shouldn’t.”

“But *now*... he wears the devil’s clothes everywhere. He just fakes being human because we are human.”

“Yeah. He feels guilty after a case and is more severe the stronger his feelings are for the murderer. If the case consumes him, then the guilt that comes afterward increases. If the case isn’t interesting, he might let go of the feeling quickly.”

“And how would you describe his case with the Midnight Ripper?” Hannibal’s second question comes after a second pause.

“For someone who is dedicated to observation, you surely don’t see much, Doc.” Brian scoffs mockingly.

“I want to hear your opinions as his friends and colleagues.”

“The man is down.” Jimmy starts the conversion again. “He is sick. You saw how many times he got lost in something only he could see? He hasn’t slept well. He hasn’t eaten in a long time. He is depressed...”

“Only surviving for the thrill of seeing *him* again.”

“He is fighting guilt and love. Because he is fighting his own guilt and the Ripper’s love.” Both men turn to look at Hannibal.

He remains indifferent to their glances. If he didn’t know better, he would have a satisfied grin painted on his face.

“You should be careful with that, Doc.” Brian warns him. “Will lives in the killers’ minds. He feels their feelings. He can think they are his. He will begin to love the Ripper as much as the Ripper loves him; if you don’t know how to apply guilt into him…”

“And if you don’t know how to apply guilt, you’ll end up murdered by your own creation.”

“That’s why Jack let him go.”

“He felt Will was coming after him.”

The car finally arrives.

Neither of them can sleep. He knows by the way the bean chair squeaks under Will’s weight every time He moves. Meanwhile, he remains perfectly still. Waiting patiently for the right moment to walk out of the room with the excuse of dehydration or to use the bathroom.

He waits.

And waits.

And waits.

He’s been waiting a lot.

Most of his life.

He didn’t know he was waiting until he knew Will.

He had friends, lovers, and people «similar» to him that could comprehend him. But he was still waiting.

Full of dust.

Forgotten somewhere dark.

Waiting.

It had never been tiring.

Yet now it hurts.

Now, now, now, now… said Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

The floor doesn’t make a sound when he moves around the room before he walks out to the small corridor. He watches Beverly’s door closed, and he makes his way towards the kitchen slowly, careful not disturbing the beast he is trying to chase down. Trying to apparent that he isn’t a menace and that he is as human as Will, that he can feel the need to be silent so he doesn’t bother others. That he hasn’t been chasing people down by controlling the sound of his shoes on pavement, wood, or forest.

“Can’t sleep either?” Will’s voice startles him.

Maybe he isn’t good at faking his intentions.

He looks at Him through the obscurity of the room, but there is no luck at finding Him. If he guides by smell, Will is still on a bean chair. More sober. The smell of dogs or pines has been washed out at some point by the smell of alcohol and salty sweat.

“No.” He whispers. “Coffee?”

“Yes, please.” The floor creaks under His weight, it releases an acute scream there where Will steps. He is careless about the tone of His voice, or about waking Beverly by talking too loudly. “And the tart.”

“I’ll cut you a piece…”

“No. The tart.” He demands.

Who is he to deny Him anything? The command alone is enough to make him stupid, mask sliding down from his face and revealing the creature that lives under it. Arousal, obsession, and submission, all at once colliding into a tide that forces him down to his knees, propitiated by the thunder-like voice of the God of the sea. Blessed be the darkness that feeds Will’s power and hides Hannibal’s weakness.

One soft light turns on, they are back to being Will and Hannibal. The shadow that the light produces obscures the shapes and colors in Will’s face; He looks more deteriorated than He did when He arrived at Beverly’s house. He was mourning.

Hannibal knows about the furtive escapes to the warehouse, the time He has been staying there, and that He even slept there once. He, too, has been waiting. He likes torturing Will a little, that way he can know what exactly is putting Him in that state but he would’ve never guess that His affliction could produce that kind of reaction on Him.

Alana and Beverly were the ones telling him about His sudden depressive episode that preceded Chiyo’s death and their first «encounter». Whether they waited for the same reaction this time or not, was left on destiny’s hands. However, Hannibal was eager to learn if the case would repeat.

He just didn’t imagine this kind of reaction.

He takes the tart out, two little spoons and two cups for their coffee. Black it is, to accompany the sweet scent of the chocolate. He can feel how Will lectures every movement he makes through Beverly’s kitchen as he works; it is in this moment that Hannibal realizes that he isn’t a friend but a suspect under Will’s steady gaze. The question on His frown is clear.

“Miss Katz and I have been friends since I started working on the consultation for the cases you were absent. We grew closer thanks to our mutual liking on food.” Hannibal answers, that seems to relax Will. “I’ve been coming casually here since then.”

“Food is the way she enchanted me.”

“She is a mastermind, not only highly qualified in her job but also talented in many different arts too. I’m not the kind of person to often praise people that I don’t know or that I’m not

fond of. And still, she stole my heart and my stomach."

Will scoffs. "I supposed that your daughter felt good knowing that her father only saved the «well done's» for her."

"Abigail grew knowing she was being praised, she also grew a bit pampered. Only that the way that I showed it was different from the way other parents compliment their children." He turns the stove on to warm the water and then walks to the bar to sit on one stool. Will copies him. "If they said pretty, I said strong. If they said good job, I said something about her efforts. If they said smart, I said wise."

"And how did that turn?"

"Into a savage, unstoppable girl who knows what she wants and how to get it. And there when parents said, «I love you» without meaning it, I said, «I am proud of you» because it is true."

He makes sure to say that to Will, not the hypothetical Abigail. Their eyes never break contact, and he can see His pupils growing with want. Will looks down to Hannibal's lips, waiting to hear the words again. Tell me you are proud.

It isn't necessarily something that He needs to hear from Hannibal, but anyone else will do as well.

He picks the spoon and breaks through the thick yet soft chocolate fill on the tart. Hannibal stares at how His teeth open to accept the offering someone made for Him. The cave closes around the sweet, and the moan that comes out of Him is music to his ears. It has no comparison and is a pleasure-full sound that Hannibal aches to hear again.

He can comprehend how Will felt when he told Him he was proud. He waits for the next bite to meet his tongue so the sound can come out to the light once more, but it never does.

"I'm lucky she doesn't make this often. I would die of intoxication due to the sugar."

"You like sweets?"

"I don't mind them. If I have to choose over her dishes with meat and her sweet dishes, I'll choose the meat." Another bite goes by, and His eyes meet Hannibal's again. "I'm sorry for getting that drunk. I couldn't taste your food properly."

"Don't you worry about that. What is important is that you ate."

"Yeah. But I really wanted to enjoy it too. Everything was delicious, the ones I can remember at least. But don't tell Beverly I said that."

'No one could know that Will ate it.' Was the murderer a cannibal? Or was it purely Will's greedy need to eat human meat?

The kettle produces a sound that tells him that the waters is ready, it isn't too loud but he doesn't mind now that he knows that Beverly is a heavy sleeper. He leaves Will's company to

prepare the two cups black coffee before returning back to the man who can't stop staring at him. He won't say anything about it, as much as he would like to know exactly what kind of feeling is the one engraved in His pupils.

"Beverly says that You are good too. In the kitchen. And in our first conversation we talked about You liking to cook."

"Not at all. I just know the basics. She just says that kind of thing to make me feel good."

"And does it work?"

Will smiles softly. "It does."

They stay quiet while Will eats the whole tart, Hannibal is more enthusiastic about seeing Him eating than in the act of eating. Is addictive to see Him chew and then swallow. The permanent ocean on His eyes shines with every piece of chocolate that comes into His mouth.

His appetite comes from Will's existence alone.

(From His bones, he will make gelatin; he will extract the grease to make lard; and with cocoa, he will make his own chocolate tart. Sweet Will. Darling Will. He will make a magnificent dessert.)

Down the tender, orange light on the room, He looks small, weak, soft. A wore-down Will coming to life with just the help of something so simple. Nor murderer nor victim. Only a bottomless pit looking for something to fill Him up. He is so destroyed; He doesn't know who He should be.

Will Graham is no longer a beast, but a poor lamb tired of walking alone in the dark, finally eating after days of wander. He is as alone as Hannibal has ever been.

"Who was Anthony Dimmond?"

Will posture changes immediately. His eyes shot upwards to meet Hannibal and the pit finally meets its contents. He acquires the position of a strong and collected man with a mind full of obsessions; unconsciously, He becomes Hannibal's mirror. Hannibal remains with a relaxed posture, if only slightly meeting the new rigidity that Will withholds. Mimicking without being obvious.

It takes infernal minutes of mind processing for Will to talk. His emotionless voice comes out like a frigid blow that smells deliciously of chocolate and coffee.

"Trash." He answers shortly and with confidence.

Hannibal recognizes a new type of fire in His eyes. Happiness. A proud master showing off the results of His job, the wonders of His monster. He returns to His tart.

Hannibal lets an embezzled smile meet his lips. Satisfaction recoils in his heart for a well done job capable of transforming Will into that precious and destructive creature.

“Anthony was a one night stand.” He continues. Less cold than before, probably sliding into the shoes of the profiler and leaving behind the mask of the proud God. “The only reason he has any meaning into his work is because he couldn’t achieve to be me. He was perfect in every sense. Good job, good money, good looks, extroverted… happy. He was beautiful.”

Hannibal disagrees but he doesn’t say so.

“But that kind of beauty is too boring for a man who seeks for meaning on Rorschach sheets tainted with blood. Is not the cattle that attracts him, but the knowledge of the impending death of the animal down his own fingers. That is why something in Anthony made him worthy, something dark…”

“But it wasn’t enough. It would never be enough.”

Will stares at the last bite of tart. “I don’t even know why I could ever be enough.”

“Why ever not? Your mind alone and Your capacity to connect with others in an almost metaphysical way is enough to make You attractive. Anthony might not have been the best option because he lacked something important. The capacity to bond and to connect with others. What you see in yourself as a curse, turns into a miracle in the right eyes.”

“Then I’ll be thrown away too once he gets to know me. Once he gets into my head he can begin to bid me adieu because all that empathy simply vanishes away once I become.”

“Empathy is not the only way to bond with others, Will.”

Will walks away, making His way into one of the bean chairs where He lets himself flop. Frustration crosses His face and is roughly swiped by two calloused hands that do nothing but color His face with red blush.

Hannibal goes behind Him, finding his seat by His side.

“I’ve been wondering who does he expect me to be.” He whispers. With one of His fingers, He follows the sound of the beating of His heart.

Hannibal has been thinking about the same thing since he read the letter. At first he was sure about the kind of man that he wanted to make out of Will’s imagination and thoughts. Now he is back at the beginning.

Will is more than the gossips and stories he has heard. And he won’t be easy to transform since his darkness is already established. All that is left is to know that monster, and make it come into the light, yet the problem remains in the fact that Hannibal hasn’t seen it. He hasn’t met *It*.

Hannibal turns to face Will only to find Him lost on His thoughts. The empty stare and the soft respiration are a clue to let him know that this absence episode is what the two men explained earlier to him; His lips are cracked due to dehydration, and every now and then, Hannibal can see His whole mouth shifting so His teeth can find relief by biting down His inner cheek.

He even bites so hard Hannibal can smell the metallic aroma of blood combining with the chocolate and the coffee. Will doesn't flinch under the pain, but He plays with the open wound, inciting more blood out of it. Hannibal wants to kiss Him in that state, taste the sanguinaccio dolce coming directly from Will's mouth and bite His lip when the taste of the scarlet liquid threatens with disappearing.

His own respiration becomes irregular, and his body tenses under the need to jump and assault Will by inflicting pain and marks all over His body. He wants to taste the soft tongue that is now covered in bloody saliva, see his pupils dilatate in wanton need and then offer Him his own blood as sacrifice. Make Him drink, and then taste himself on Will's mouth.

Hannibal follows Will's gaze before It can happen, before his own desires break through all the years of preparation. They both stare at the bean chair in front of them. The intoxicating smell of Will is enough to put him in a similar trance than the one Will is having, notwithstanding, it doesn't allow him to see what Will sees.

What a shame.

Here, in the darkness of the room, there is a ghost only Will can recognize. It is a dark creature that Will uses to talk and to be heard, its appearance will forever be a secret but Hannibal can't stop himself from trying to wander amid all those sequences of thoughts that can lead him to the ghost. He finds nothing but a whisper from his past.

On the other side, there is no one for him. Not a haunting image that reminds him of his regrets or pleasures, nor a vision that could coincide with Will's visions. Sometimes, a little girl appears by his side, collecting flowers for him to make her a crown. He always obliges. With expertise hands, he makes crowns that he puts on her bloody head; branches, and leaves go along in the sticky golden hair that covers her head.

He can no longer remember her face.

For a man who can remember everything–smell, texture, text, view–something crucial like that little girl has vanished from this world a long time ago. Perhaps she didn't have a face to begin with. She was born without any other purpose. Destined to be nothing but food.

She was never meant to be human… that is not right. He was never meant to be human for starters; that is why the sweet scent of her small, fresh body is stronger than the pictures taken of his head. Hannibal isn't dressing her in crowns like a queen. He is decorating his dish. All he needed was a bad day and a good moment. And one day, her face disappeared.

"What would he do if I kill myself?" Will takes him out of his dreams this time.

Hannibal doesn't answer immediately.

If Will ever took the privilege of ending His life with His own hands…

"He would rage." The monster behind Hannibal answers. "He will finish Your job and kill the ones You love. Rage will turn him so blind he'll end up killing himself, condemning his life to a prison cell."

You can't be that unworthy. You can't be that weak to kill yourself. You can't leave me. Your life and death, both belong to me.

"My death will be the perfect revenge."

"Is that what motivates You? Revenge?"

Hannibal wanders in the same paths that Will walks. His sight is lost in the distance too. Neither of them is talking to who they believe they are talking. Their voices are only recordings of the men they used to be.

"I want him dead." The words make him shiver. "I want to die in front of him. I want him to see and be incapable of doing anything to avoid it."

"Why not grant him the same end You granted to other criminals?"

"A shot in the head would be too merciful." Will has a weak yet malevolent grin on His face. "I want him to know pain, I want him to know me."

A life without Will. Dogs, pines, ugly aftershave, dirt, all of them full of Will, and yet none of them would be Will no matter how much he tries to combine them. He could live in His house, sleep on His bed, and wear those hideous clothes He likes to wear. And everything would be so empty. Is a life without meaning.

"A reasonable price to pay for the things he has taken from You." The perfect torture. "Your quiet life, Your steady life. The most sane version of Yourself. All disturbed by a man who can't even call himself a man."

Will shakes his head. "I never got anything of that. They never truly belonged to me. It is pain for pain's sake. Eye for an eye."

Hannibal turns to see His face. His movements are lethargic and soft, the weight of the trance and the smell of blood has him under strong anesthesia, making it hard for him to properly wear the human mask before Will can recognize the monster.

Nothing of that matters when he sees Will, though. Sorrow and grief are mixed in the blurry painting of what was once His face. He turns to look at Hannibal, but he doesn't see the monster. Because it is not Hannibal who He is looking for.

Will turns to face the imago He has created of the Midnight Ripper, wishing it were the monster of His dream His reality rather than the man someone put on His path to «help» Him get better. Hannibal stares back at the imago he has built of Will and not to the remains of a beast he drove close into extinction.

'I miss you.' They think.

Chapter End Notes

Writing Hannibal is HAAAAAAAAARD, I feel connected to Will so making him suffer or writing him in general is easy, but Hannibal... I had to squeeze my brains to find something.

And just as an observation before I go, I think of Will Graham as Odysseus. A righteous man whose mercy brings him problems and who ends up being the only one to survive at the end of his journey. I have to make more research before I discard this theory completely, and you will find that I compare him to other characters and "beings" because I love my little freak a lot.

Bye-bye!

Winston

Chapter Summary

Will meets Winston

Chapter Notes

It's just about Winston. Inspired by my cat.
I had many pets before, only in him I can recognize myself as a mirror.
I love him.

To Monet, for being the best boy

Training Winston was easier than he thought. The little boy learned fast how to do some tricks and follow commands. He was also eager to play with the other dogs on the pack, so the acceptance process hadn't been difficult thanks to his gentle nature and his ability to recognize his position in the hierarchy.

However, there was one thing that Will hadn't learned how to solve as much as he tried to.

Winston never seemed to leave his side.

Bathroom, room, couches, the lake, everywhere. He even howled in sadness every time Will had to leave his home, he was also the first one to welcome him when he returned back. In some way, his behavior made complete sense.

Will found him on the side of the road, walking with a goal but without a destination. As soon as he spotted the wounded animal, he stopped to try and catch him. It was almost desperate of him to try to chase him in the middle of the dark with only the lights of his car illuminating them. The fear of leaving him in the middle of the night where someone could crash into him disappeared once Will recognized that he had walked to that point from somewhere even farther away.

He went home. He got a few treats and a can of dog food. He returned.

Hunger is, for Will, a problem and a solution. Any hungry dog would come to anyone offering food, and with that, man and dog run with different risks. The dog might bite the hand that feeds and the man might kill the ingenious creature.

Fortunately for both of them, hunger was a solution.

Winston was worse than Will had thought at first. The rope around his neck was tight enough to cut flesh; superficial yet painful. His fur was a mess of dirt, blood and whatnot, tangled in some places, non-existent in others. Nails long enough to deform his paws and fleas and ticks rummaging his fur. He had escaped some place where he had been left to die–probably–he found life fighting.

He felt a dark rage burning deep down in him, a sense of justice mixed with revenge that flew on freely on his veins. It stopped when the dog started whipping for more food. It wasn't his rage what mattered, it was only the dog and his pack back at home.

"Rough day, right?" He asked the dog. The dog only kept looking for more food. "Me too."

When food wasn't delivered, the dog sat, eyes never leaving Will. They stared at each other for a while, patiently waiting for the other to fight or to run and leave everything behind.

"What do you want from me?" Will asks gently.

Whatever he wanted, Will was going to concede. Will was going to give that nameless dog something better that pure freedom. He was going to give him everything for A to Z.

"Are you a good dog? I'm not a good man. But I can give you the live you deserve." A faint smile appeared in his lips, not convincing enough. He can't be sure of his own words. "You'll have a bed, homemade food, a family."

He reaches behind his back to take the lash that he uses to fasten his dogs to the back seats. The dog sniffs it as soon as it appears in front of him. Will doesn't sense that he might bite, but he is ready to take the risk.

"It's okay if you are a bad dog. I'll love you the same." His other hand asks for permission to pet him; the dog leans into his palm.

The reaction he might get when he touches his neck is dubious. The pain surely is enough to flinch away from Will but the collar clicks correctly on its place whiteout the dog trying to escape from his hands. He sits still, almost proud of being in presence of Will, ready for anything.

"Red looks good on you." The tail waves softly.

Will takes him home.

"The wound is almost gone. You heal fast, kid."

Winston barks. He has been barking non-stop since he got used to the house and the other dogs.

Winston is the last dog he brushes, for any reason, he waits for his brothers and sisters to go first before he sits in front of Will. He didn't had to teach him that, in fact, he didn't had to teach him much since he was so eager to cooperate in every game and activity.

Freedom definitely suits him better. His fur shines under the sun and its texture is something out of a dream. On a good day or a bad day, he can just put his face on Winston's belly to feel the warmth.

The first two days Will had to leave him alone, he used to scratch the front door in an attempt to escape and follow him. He had to sand and paint the door again when Winston finally comprehend that Will was always coming back home.

And even when the need to run behind his own ghost came, Winston was ready to go with him to all those places. He was the only dog to know about the warehouse and the little cabin lost in the forest. And he was–in Alana's words–a type of guardian different from the other dogs. A soul mate made just for him.

All his kids had been rescued, all of them had tragic pasts or sad stories to be told. All of them were loyal and caring and lovely. But Winston was a like his own reflection.

He learned that, if the Ripper was his shadow, then Winston was his light. Pictures and projections of distant times withholding Will's happiness and pride, that tender beauty that Alana once loved. Will before the bullets and the blood.

Any time Winston slept by his side or ran to calm him down, Will could see the answer of the question he asked the night they met, almost as if it was written on his eyes, as if Winston was a bark away to tell him something.

The night he spent all his hours looking through Chiyo's drawings and designs, the night he made his decision to chase a monster for the sake of his kids, Winston came to him. His wide open and inquiring of the future of his owner.

He saw Chiyo standing behind the dog. Sad eyes and a weak smile.

She too had been a pet for a man who was falling into insanity. He is different, she said, he won't care about you or him as long as you love him. I couldn't love my master enough for him to save me. He couldn't love me enough to spare my life.

Will doesn't want that for his dogs. For the only family he has. Whatever impossible mission he is preparing isn't worthy if that means leaving them alone. He doesn't want their hearts in a jar. He needs them alive and happy. And he needs to be there to watch them grow and get old.

Winston places his head on Will's knee, a way to start a little petting session to distract Will from «work». Alana loved that little pleasure.

She saw love on those dogs. He sees the best of him in them. A reason worth fighting for even if he becomes a monster.

I'm a good dog. Winston said. *Are you really a bad man?*

He doesn't want to be one. He wants him to become one. The Ripper might win.

"I'll be gone one day. My body or mind." He would answer to Winston. "Are you gonna love me still?"

The dog said nothing.

Will comes back home one Friday after his dismissal from the hospital. Beverly doesn't stay long, leaving him completely alone.

He watches her car leave the property before he decides to go in.

The dogs rush to welcome him after so long. He smiles genuinely for the first time in weeks. The touch of their fur on his skin almost brings him to tears when the memory of dying–if only momentarily–comes into his mind.

Someone is watching him from afar, he can sense those eyes watching him with scrutiny. Will raises his head only to find Winston sitting under the kitchen threshold. Winston doesn't seem angry at him, nor sad for their abandonment under Lecter's care.

You are alive. Winston would say in relief. *You are home.*

"I'm sorry." He tells his dogs. But they don't understand like Winston understands. They don't notice that Will isn't asking for their forgiveness, he is only talking to Winston.

Being in the hospital was a kind of torture that he didn't want to experience again. He knew Alana would take care of his dogs; she'd give them a good life and they'd have assurance that at least she wouldn't leave them alone with a broken heart. But that thought, he discovered, wasn't something that comforted him.

In the past, thinking about his death and the consequences and the life after his was something rather easy. Now that he had experienced death by first hand... now that he knows that one of his dogs prefers him more over Alana, or that one of them cries when he leaves, or that the same one can't stand sleeping with his siblings because there is something comforting about Will.

I'm a good dog. You are a bad man.

He can stand being a bad man. He doesn't know much about being a bad owner.

"I'm sorry." Will pleads again with a broken voice.

Winston abandons the scenario to walk upstairs. His rejection hurts more than the scars on his arms or the lesion on his head; he feels alone despite being surrounded by his other kids.

Whatever he is preparing isn't worth fighting for if that means losing Winston.

His Days of Starvation

Chapter Summary

> “I love you.” She sobbed.
>
> The ground under her feet seemed to shake in an anxious wait.
>
> “I love you.” She begged.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

> “I keep having nightmares. They’re not as bad as they used to be, but I can’t fall asleep again after waking up.”
>
> “How is that affecting Your normal life.”
>
> “What does it mean to be normal?”
>
> Hannibal can’t give Him a good example.
>
> Normal means nothing for someone like him or Will. They both have been sharing that since the day they were born, maybe even before creation itself. They experience and perceive things in ways that other people can’t comprehend, they both see beauty where there’s destruction and they see ugliness where others see *normality*.
>
> After the night they shared at Beverly’s house, they have become closer. Will is at least more open about His feelings–even if the only thing He can feel is *anger*–and His thoughts, unafraid of scaring Hannibal with the «absurdities» that sometimes come from His mouth.
>
> “That depends completely on how You want to address it. What is normality for You, Will?”
>
> He sighs. Hannibal can see Him licking his low teeth while He waits for the answer to come into His mind. It is seductive.
>
> *(He could bite it off from His mouth–)*
>
> “I don’t think it’s affecting me. Not in a significant way.”
>
> “Are You sure?”
>
> “Is up to you if you want to believe me or not.”

“Will, in the last months You have lost three pounds. Your face looks tired and You are paler than normal. Not forgetting that You had a car accident four days ago and You disappeared for three entire weeks. If this is what it means to be normal for You, then we have to sit and discuss the definition because nothing that represents damage against Yourself should be considered normal.”

“Let it be, Doc.”

“No. You come into my office after months refusing to do so, and just now I’m learning that there is a possibility that the FBI might fire You again because You chose to steal important information from them.”

“It was borrowed. I can take it if I want to, is part of my job.”

“Not according to them. You took the file out of the facilities and then «lost it» in the middle of nowhere.”

“You are well informed.” Will smiles, sardonic.

If Hannibal didn’t love Him so much, he would’ve kill Him since the day that they met. It wouldn’t be in order of consuming His body so He can live inside him, though. Will could have the same destiny as Anthony if that means stopping His inconsiderate mouth from talking any more. To say that he feels irritated is an understatement. He fidgets with the pen on his hands while trying to keep his face unaffected by his emotions.

“Will. I need to understand the situation if You want me to help. What happened since the last time I saw You?”

October was nice. He didn’t had another episode similar to the one he had last year, but he was feeling uncomfortable, nevertheless.

It had begun with a picture of Anthony Dimmond on TattleCrime under the description of:

THE DEVIL’S PROPHET: A DECLARATION OF LOVE ANNOUNCING BLOOD.

The words were spooky, sickening. They were also right. Her description of the case was almost accurate except for the lack of association between Will and the «prophet», if her head ever made the connection then she was refusing to accept it. Will was thankful with her delusional mind creating stories and theories that pushed the public attention far from him. Of course, it wouldn’t last much until someone showed the evidence that could put him on the spotlight, he just had a lucky shot.

Telling Freddy to call <u>him</u> The Midnight Ripper was enough to expose himself, but he wasn’t ready to give up on his plan.

Will stared at the photo, incapable of feeling nothing. That had been his first red light telling him to stop and rest. He wasn’t feeling anything against Anthony, no guilt nor pleasure. The

indifference was so big he began to think he was running out of emotions, or that maybe he was dissociating from his issues as a copy mechanism.

Chiyo told him that he was repressing his feelings, a reasonable explanation for his lack of them, but no matter how hard he tried to discover what was Anthony awakening on him, he couldn't find nothing. There was beauty in the way he was depicted; soft fabrics covering his body with elegance as he watched the empty pews on the chapel, a colorful offering under his feet like a promise of beauty in the time of dead, and blood washing down his arms like holy water blessing the ground. Will tried to look at him like he did, any artistic conception was welcomed into his hypothesis, yet they weren't enough to satisfy his curiosity.

The jealousy he once felt when he was researching the body had left a trait of bitter emotions that tasted like bile. It now felt bad, rotten, disrespectful. It was also the last time something felt real and his. So it wasn't jealousy.

He tried feeling guilty, but Anthony wasn't his victim. He didn't write about his dead nor he sentenced him to the execution that ended his life. Anthony is just another decomposing body beneath the surface of the ground, waiting for his death to have meaning, yet not having what he aches for. He does have a meaning*, Chiyo tells him,* he is part of your collection. *An ornament in someone's memory, destined to be soon forgotten by time and the imperfections of the mind. What a pathetic purpose.*

Will tried hunting as a way to work on it. The logic behind that thought was that giving the little animals Anthony's name would help him visualize what was he feeling, or if he was projecting someone else's feelings over his own.

Down went a rabbit, down went a duck. He felt more guilty taking them home and cooking dinner with them than he felt watching Anthony's body hanging from the ceiling of a chapel.

He had called Lecter as a last resource opinion that night:

"What did you feel back at the chapel?"

He weighs his answer a few seconds, then: "I felt calm. Peace. I often do when I work on his cases. Tsubame left me feeling on the edge of nirvana a few weeks, «Danae» was nothing but a quick inspection inside a human body, Anthony… it was artistic. Holy. They feel impersonal but at the same time they feel like everything. I now he feels pleasure killing them and taking their organs away, I can feel it. But I also feel my own peace."

"As if you just did a well-done job?" Will nods. Hannibal can't see him through the call but he interprets the silence as agreement. "Is it really you, or is it him?"

"It is me. I crave for some sense of violence that only he can provide. His peace for a well-done job. My peace for satisfying things I don't want to reckon on myself."

"Notwithstanding, you do recognize the ache for carnage withing you. You introduced yourself as a killer the first time we met, almost swearing on your dead mother's grave that no mistake or federal absolution or divine intervention could spare you from having that title as part of yourself. The actions of your past serve as a condemn more than a warning about

the person that you are, nevertheless. The death of the victims linked to your book are part of that penitence, and you have handle it so well, carrying that ball and chain, proud of being recognized as the monster that you are."

"I was aware of that." He fell into his couch. Jack, one of his dogs, stomped to him so Will could pet him while the conversation continued.

The soft white fur caressing his fingers made him smile.

"Do you know about the expression l'appele du vide?" Hannibal asked.

"The appeal of the vacuum?"

"The correct translation of the concept would be «The Call of the Void». It refers to the constant intrusive thoughts that are presented in our lives: jumping from a cliff where we were previously watching the view, slitting our wrists with the knife we are using to cut our meal. Images and feelings often engage to destructive behaviors against our personal well-being. You are often impulse by this call of the void, but you don't indulge on it, not consciously, at least. Your unconscious has find ways of jumping from certain cliffs, and perhaps working on this type of cases is your own way to indulge into the void little by little, like a disease worsening with every passing day. You are looking for the diversions he can offer, so you can have a reason to be stigmatized and justly punished."

"I'm looking for ways to damage myself?" Will took a peek at his arm relatively full of shining scars. His dog licked his forearm, breaking the concentration on it.

"So your life of unjust punishes can have any meaning."

He doesn't like the conclusion, but he doesn't argues back.

"Wait, what does anything of this has to do with Anthony?"

"You lack any interest in him because he isn't helping you on your way to auto-destruction. You said it yourself; he is neither your victim or a burden on your conscience, therefore, he isn't part of the multiple tactics you can use to flagellate yourself. He is no one, for neither of you."

"Just and ornament." They said at the same time.

Chiyo. Chiyo. Chiyo. If someone knew about ornaments made with human bones then it was Chiyo. And he had a bag full of evidence behind an old fridge on his barn. He walked out of his house nearly early morning; his watch had said 2 a.m. when he last checked it.

It was quiet. No wind, no animals, nothing. Pure isolation made for his own amusement. It was like being in a different reality where only he existed, clean air filling his lungs and a cool breeze touching his skin so gently it was almost ghostly. Time paused for him the minute he put a foot outside, the sound of his steps was consumed by the vortex around him. The sky above him showed its glowing diamonds with so much pride.

It is a cemetery*, Chiyo said from the shadows of the woods and the shadows of his mind,* billions of dead bodies showing their final breath for you, for us. They send their flames towards the Earth as a sign, they are saying «hi», they are saying «goodbye», they cry for help, and yet we celebrate under their light, under their last words. Billions of gas spheres burning at thousands of years light, glowing. Was their death meaningless? Is Anthony really that unworthy?

The silence in the barn didn't feel any different, but it became more suffocating. A silence so profound it seemed to engulf his thoughts and flesh, squishing, sucking, blowing. Space itself kept inside the room, a connection between his reality and another different time where he existed as something else than just a product of his imagination. Someone real, tangible. His movements inside the barn were weightless, as if gravity had no domination on Earth.

With the darkness blinding his eyes, he made his way to the hideout where the bag rested; the texture of the soft human skin caressing his fingertips built trust in him. Will took it out and brought it to his chest. Fearing that it would be dragged away from him by the lack of gravity around him. He went out of the barn, locking it behind him «just in case».

Have you seen the moon tonight, Will?*, Chiyo stood at the end of the stairs of his house, she was looking at the stars.* It used to be part of the Earth, a little piece of something bigger that was removed violently from its original place, left adrift to wander on the darkness. So close to its original carrier, yet so far away from the place it once called home. Remembered what he said about hearts and moons and suns? He is a liar, liar, liar… he didn't gave you his heart. He gave you mine. Left now in the obscurity, far from the place I once called home, far away from the place that once kept it protected. Away from me.

His dogs slept comfortably in their little beds, uncaring about their owner's nocturnal activities. The only one accompanying him–he noticed–was Winston who never seemed to be able to sleep if Will wasn't sleeping. He sat at his couch, bag placed on the coffee table, breath held strongly inside his lungs.

Soon enough, long antlers stuck out of a young girl's body like branches breaking the earth as they looked for water to survive; she hung from them as her blood ran down covering her naked body with thin lines, yet it wasn't enough to give her some sort of respect. The graffito made everything black but it didn't stop him from seeing the real picture.

She has been exposed like an animal after a hunt, left there specially to bleed out into big buckets so she could be cut out later without making a mess.

What about her death, Will? Was it meaningless too? Did she had a purpose? Will you give her recognition?

The next pictures were more of the same. He counted eight victims including the first girl he saw. The labs results from Chiyo's cabin showed no trace of human blood or remains, and the antlers over the door of her cabin didn't seem to match with the ones stabbing those girls. The drawings and one of the letters made clear that there is another cabin, he just needs to find it.

The forest around her cabin was a place where she used to hunt but not a place where she killed… it wouldn't have any sense. Moving a body from point A to point B would be too risky considering all the problems she could find in the road.

So it could be another option of her playing «Dexter» and being too good at hiding bodies, which coincides with her M.O. And it also makes it all more entertaining because it brings him back to the beginning of knowing absolutely nothing.

What about your death, Will? Or his death as a matter of fact. Will it bring you the peace that you look for? Will it bring you the purpose that you seek? Or would you be another Anthony? Another star on the sky.

He had seen the same thing before, he was a different man working in a different crime. Alana was still dubious of their relationship as friends (always avoiding him, keeping her distance). *A name popped up on his name, not quite right but a clue.*

Elise Nicols.

The computer showed the picture of a girl identical to the young girls on the drawings, a brunet with blue eyes who looked happily at the camera. It was followed by the picture of her autopsy. Once alive, then dead. The situation was uncanny, he never met her yet it didn't stop him from having chills at the recognition of her body on the medical table. Cold shiny metal freezing her back.

He found her lying on her bed a long time ago, a child tucked in bed by someone who loved her enough to let her rest in the commodity of her bed, white lace covering her body and her hair brushed to give her the appearance of a princess. The FBI had interrupted her peaceful resting, desecrating her purity and beauty with the cold table and the cuts displayed on her chest and head.

They were all extracted from Minnesota, playgrounds and houses on Chippewa's National Forest where people often went for fun. Hunting, swimming, just a weekend far from the city. The search teams must have gone from place to place asking questions about suspicious activities while a little crossed was getting dissolved in a barrel of something.

It didn't take him long to find the house. The files said it had been occupied by a young Japanese woman who had been offering her help in the search of the girls. Her house was found clean, and she was soon discarded of any suspicion.

Graham congratulated her before taking the file.

Dead children were the worst. He didn't like killing children, and neither did Elise's killer. But there they were, two unknown beings connected by the same girl and the white lace on her dress.

She had holes all over her chest, the same pattern as the others. Elise was the only victim left behind and whose body they could find and use for an investigation that never met its end, she had first stage cancer on her liver, whoever took her discarded her because there was something wrong with the meat.

They called «him» The Shrike. A bird that likes to impale its victims in branches and thorns for later consumption. Carnivores. A cannibal.

Now he wasn't so sure about the description considering Chiyo's nature, but it was possible that she did considering her need for honoring every single part. But children?

'You'll find a diversity of people, always excluding kids on our demographics, she changed a lot from victim to victim since the only thing that mattered to her was her rituals. Kill, recreate, reuse, thank.'

How did she reused their bodies? Did she thanked after eating, after killing? Did she ever forgive herself for doing so?

Does God ever forgive himself for doing what he does? *Chiyo said.*

"Why the sudden interest in a past case?" Beverly asked when he went visiting.

It was a Monday morning; he had been sleeping on the warehouse all weekend with the hope that an answer could come magically into his mind. He cleaned and inspected the place, careful not to touch anything that could represent his curiosity in case it meant any problem to their «dynamic». He also discovered weird sounds on one of the shafts on the basement.

"The Ghost's victims share similarities with The Shrike's victims. Abduction, dismemberment, use of the bodies for incorrect purposes… has some logic behind it."

"Only if you are becoming delusional. Are you becoming delusional?" She went int her room, shouting her answers from there. Beverly was getting ready for a trip to a new case on Louisiana. "The Ghost and The Shrike had different motives and demographics. And the only reason why we «know» about the Shrike's history is because of the Nicols girl, they never left any evidence apart from that, so you can't be sure that their procedures were similar."

"They share a liking for the meat."

"So? Sharing traits doesn't mean being the same person." She came back with her luggage in hand. Will stared at the case. "Picture this, Tsubame committed a lot of abductions, she must have recognized a hundred different diseases that transformed the meat into something disposable. Do you think that she would have taken her time to return them home, dress them, tuck them into bed, kiss their foreheads and leave?"

"She only left Elise Nicols in her bead because she had some respect for her."

"Respect?"

"I could feel it, it was… it was respect, love or compassion. Tsubame was grieving when she took her home."

"How can you be sure it wasn't your own feelings being projected over the death of a child?"

"That's not how it works." He tugged his hair softly, there was some kind of relief after doing that. "That is not how I work."

She sighed. Arguing against Will's convictions when he es already focused in something isn't wise. No one can take the idea out when they are already planted in his brain.

"Listen. I don't know anything else apart from what is already written on the files. I need you to take a rest. Focus in another thing because this isn't good for you." Beverly walked to him. She took the plate that she had previously served him, half eaten and cold. He had barely touched it, but the meat was completely gone. "Why don't you go with Alana somewhere far from here?"

"I don't even know where Alana is."

That had been their first kiss.

Normally, they would just stay next to each other, sometimes cuddling, sometimes just sitting. They would held hands and they hugged a lot. But they never kissed, it was forbidden. Somehow, it had become an unspoken rule to never cross that boundary, as if breaking the rule would had meant the end of the world or the end of the universe. Yet, Margot never thought it would actually mean the end of their relationship.

She held Morgan closer to her chest, afraid that he would also leave if she loosened her grip on him. She knew that one day he would; he would become king of the empire and he would leave her to start a new live somewhere. She would end up alone because there was no woman who could replace Alana, and she would watch her going on in life by the hand of a man who didn't even had any interest in her.

"But you'll be mine forever." She whispered against the baby's soft hair. He giggled in response.

"Of course he will." A familiar voice responded. "Bad mothers might eat their children's hearts, but only good mothers can live in them forever."

"Not a week with Will Graham, huh?"

Margot cracked her head to the right. Alana had a sorrowful expression on her face. It was almost faint but visible enough for Margot to notice. She turned again to look at the garden before them. A beautiful parade of colorful roses in the shape of a labyrinth surrounded them. She didn't like them, but she tolerated them in the name of her mother.

She had always preferred small, resilient flowers. The ones with the capacity to survive anywhere they decided to take roots. To her, the flower on the side of the road was prettier than the pampered sprout that could easily die.

Margot had to suppress a hint of a smile forming on her lips. The Vergers pride comes before love, that is something that her family taught her very well. And she is still hurt after all. She can't always let Alana win.

"You didn't tell security that I wouldn't be coming anymore."

“I never doubted for a second that you would leave forever.” She took a pause. “Because we are friends and everything.”

The sentence struck a sharp sting of pain in Alana’s heart. It turned into a thunderbolt in her mind that she couldn't let go. She took a few steps closer to Margot, trying to give her enough time to run away from her or to choose to stay still. To her own surprise, the woman stayed in her place, absently watching the petals and leaves moving from side to side thanks to the wind.

“I–” ‘I’m sorry. I couldn’t let you go; I don’t know why I did it,’ are sentence is left unspoken. “I thought you might need help with Morgan.” She said instead.

Alana put a hand on the kid’s forehead, caressing softly the fluff decorating his little head. She utilized it as an excuse to stand closer to Margot, feeling her warmth and smelling her essence with eager hunger. It took all on her not to look for a hug under the woman’s grip, and it took her a lot more not to break in an ugly cry.

No, not even a week. She couldn’t handle that much time around him anymore, not when he started driving home at unsteady hours, even less when the smell of dead lingered on his back like a ghost. Alana knew that he enjoyed it, and after the discovery of the last body, it was palpable that he was careless of hiding his own fascination with it.

She had played pretend, she put a perfect mask of indifference in her face and she tried to eat everything he prepared for her like every morning. But this time, she couldn’t swallow it entirely. She had stopped many times to vomit whatever Will fed her because she couldn’t stop seeing it. The man behind Will.

It had been a long time since she last saw him, and she had grown used to Will’s self-destruction rather than his closeness to destruction itself; it didn't make it any easier to watch considering how much she loved him, but it was still preferable than knowing she was sleeping back to back with a potential murderer. Margot killing her brother in self-defense was different from Will killing for the pleasure of killing; she was shaped into her own form of violence meanwhile, Will was inherently born with it, always laying low like a crocodile waiting for its prey to come near the tranquil water.

So, no. Not even a week. Because even if Will was doing fine, she couldn’t handle being a week away from Margot. She was so confident that she would always be by her side that she didn’t realize how much it would hurt to let her go.

Margot was a safe place, a home, somewhere to return when she felt low. Cutting ties with her only made her realize how much she was taking from her and how little she was giving back. And it made her feel afraid of losing her forever. Loneliness and a broken heart were bad for her. She didn't want them near.

“Morgan and I have been doing good on our own.” Margot answered, walking away from Alana. The other woman only followed her near as she tried not to make a sound. “We have everything we can wish for here, and we have each other. We don’t need anything else.”

Her voice sounded rough, cruel. Alana scowled in pain, but she couldn’t say anything.

They kept walking with Alana following them from behind in a slow pace, like a martyr walking to her execution. Margot couldn't help but feel bad about her, she did deserved her annoyance and her rage, nevertheless. And Alana took it well.

"You are cruel, Alana." She said when they arrived at the center of the labyrinth. There was a little bench where she found a place to sit, Morgan was deeply asleep on his mother's arms. "And in some way that makes you perfect for Will."

Alana didn't sit. Instead, she remained stood on her two feet near the entrance of the labyrinth. A child waiting to be scolded.

"You walked away, and you expect me to be there when you need me. You think I will always be there when you need me."

In some way, that made her similar to Will, too. Both of them pleasing Alana's unconscious needs and suffering the consequences of her complexes and idealizations. But only one of them loved her the right way.

Alana said nothing in return. She lowered her head to stare at her shoes, waiting shamefully for her punishment.

"And the worst part is that I will. Because I'm stupid enough to love you when I shouldn't." Just when Margot sobbed she realized that her tears were wetting the head of her son.

She cleaned the tears away with a shaky hand.

"I love you since the day I met you. Since I saw you at that gala with your beautiful blue dress and those horrible shoes… you really had weird shoes." She laughs. It is a sad sound, nevertheless. "But I never thought I'll be meeting someone as smart as you–"

Mason used to think the same, that was why he chose Alana as his therapist. And because he needed to keep an eye on his sister's new toy. Mason had always been a little boy deep into his unconscious, always showing a big ego and finding the little kids table more suitable than the adults table. He was hazardous. Margot considered him a rotten spoiled child who never went over the stage of breaking his sister's toys just for fun and who never learnt what it meant to grow up.

Just like he did many times before, he took Alana for himself. He tried to play with her by scaring her and showing parts of himself that could easily freak anyone out. But Margot and Mason didn't know the kind of person that someone like Will Graham creates.

After a life walking blindly in a dark room full of cracks and loosen boards, Alana had learnt to be careful and graceful with her movements; she turned the table for Mason, creating a hundred mind games to protect herself. Margot was proud of her for doing so, a bit too much proud, enough to let her brother know that she was still human no matter how well she played to be a doll. She was still breakable.

She hid the wounds, the dark circles and the purple spots staining her skin. She did a good job because it meant keeping her life and her commodities safe while protecting Alana in the

only way that she knew. Because pain was nothing compared to that beautiful smile and those fugitive hugs that Alana gave her when they greeted each other, or those little gifts that they exchanged, or the way that her hair flew freely when the wind hit her head making her look like a goddess.

Bearing an unwanted child was nothing compared to the way Alana's eyes shined when she watched the horses, or the soft and warmth touch of her hands covering Margot's face as her fingers cleaned away her tears.

Killing her brother was a nuisance compared to the life she could give to the woman she loved…

But she wasn't hers.

Hiding her feeling was nothing compared to seeing Alana's face every time she talked about Will, about how sweet he used to be and how perfect he played the perfect husband, about how weird and fragile he was, about how murderous he could become. Margot always swallowed her emotions, her love and her tears for a woman who didn't love her like she loved her. She hid her desire to kill Will a free Alana like she freed herself from her brother, then they could be together somewhere far away.

Until that kiss, and that kiss was what she needed to be on her knees begging for Alana to love her correctly, to not deny herself from the love that she felt for her, to–

"–stay with me. I don't care if you want to be his friend, if you want to keep worrying about him… just… don't go back there. Stay here, this is your house. I can be your home. Alana, stay with me, because I love you and I can't bear to be somewhere you can't touch me or see me." Her words came out of her throat in a cracking and pitiful sound. Like the haunting sound of a ghost. She held Morgan close to her chest, swinging herself back and front in a way to find some comfort. "I can't let you, Alana. Don't let me go. Don't let this go. I love you."

Alana sat by her side as close as she could. Without saying a single word, she brought Margot into her arms.

"I love you." Margot repeated.

Alana kissed the top of her hair, inhaling the sweet smell of the hair products that Margot always used. She traced gentle circles in her back as she felt it deflating every time Margot let go a loud sob. Her heart ached at the sound of those mournful sounds that felt contagious; Alana's tears fell down her cheeks until they met Margot's head, kissing her hair too.

"I love you." She sobbed.

The ground under her feet seemed to shake in an anxious wait.

"I love you." She begged.

How could she ever let her go? Margot was her own precious thing, an amulet that felt easy to love because she loved her with the same intensity. She was a home already. Being with Margot made breathing easier, a goddess on earth who enchanted the nights and made the world a better place. She was her little secret, not because she was afraid of others finding out, but because she was Paradise resting her head on her thigs while Alana read her novels and told her stories.

"I love you."

She was the breeze of the morning, the ephemeral feeling of flying when riding a horse, the sweet smell of cherries and the beautiful taste of a pie. And she had denied herself all those gifts because she was scared to break something that was already broken.

"I love you."

Will Graham had a devil on his shoulder whispering sweet nothings to his ear; he was already enjoying dressing as a murderer, making deals with the devil under the light of the moon. He was the fire burning a house that never welcomed Alana in, and all it took her to realize how close she was to being burned was that little glimpse of excitement lighting up in his eyes when they called him into some church that morning.

"I love you."

She didn't want to be consumed by the fire. She wanted Margot.

"I love you."

She chose Margot's burning love over Will's destructive fire. "I love you." Alana finally whispered back.

November came in a blink.

He left his time go wishing and hoping for an answer that he didn't expected.

The box cracked under his touch as if it was trembling for the contents on its inside. Will had created the habit of opening it just in case something like this ever happened, considering that <u>he</u> disappeared after the rounds, he supposed that it would also apply to the letters but he could always keep some steadiness in his life to keep it under control. This was the fruits of that arduous work; he had a letter:

Dear Will,

Beautiful in Your passions,

Loyal to Your sins,

Come and catch me, heart of mine,

Burn all that is divine.

Tame the beast that haunts You,

Teach me how to die.

I admire how constantly You have been with Your visits, so I'll leave You this to calm down Your anxieties and Your heart. I won't be back until the snow melts, so this will be the last letter I send you. Please, be patient, my dear. But I will need something from You in return, a short letter won't keep me entertained while Christmas Eve goes by, and I would like to know what has been of Your life since the last time we talked.

I have to thank You for the photo, despite not liking the idea of the FBI putting their noses on my stuff, I can't deny that I like having a piece of memory back. Did it gave You any clue? Do You feel closer to me now that You know something else about me? I hope it helped, and I hope You liked being on my sanctuary. I'm not mad about it, after all, it was made for You, love.

Take Your time exploring more secrets of mine.

But don't take long killing me, dear. I'll be waiting Your fists on my jaw and Your blood on my mouth.

Yours entirely,

1. *M. R.*

The last letter? And so very little to say? AFTER THE HELL <u>HE</u> PUT WILL INTO?

The sound that Will made wasn't exactly a laugh, it hurt his throat when it came out, likely due the fact that the laugh was an attempt to hide the scream of exhaustion and anxiety that he had been holding all along. So he screamed, gutturally and loud enough to make a few birds take flight.

Will kept the note with the other things he put on the basement so he wouldn't lose it on his journey, to receive it just when he was about to leave the state was something unexpected, as if he was suspicious of his activities involving the cabin but those were his delusions playing against him. He brushed it off as a coincidence before he went to his car.

Trees that can almost touch the sky and a colorful view made with dead leaves and a house that shined when the Sun hit it exactly right, the blue looks pale in autumn but it still was a perfect complement to the scenario. It was beautiful and imponent, nothing similar to how he imagined it would look like since the drawings gave little information about how it truly presented itself. The wind blew softly over the dead leaves, whipping them around and showing some pieces of animal skulls spread on the ground; he got an eerie feeling of it that ended up killing the admiration he felt at first.

Will entered the place, finding a bigger representation of Chiyo's little cabin; there was equipment exclusive for hunting, some trophies under Chiyo's fake name, a small kitchen with

a large fridge like the one he had on the barn along with some material used for crafting different articles, and a bed large enough for two people. The evident dust over the little furniture was thick enough to let him know that no one had put a foot on the cabin over a long time.

He took his time to look all over the first level of the house, it smelled a bit musty thanks to the contention of humidity inside the cabin. The hunting provisions consisted on rifles, two bows and arrows with paralyzers–probably full of M99–bullets, traps, lanterns and lamps, binoculars, shotguns and enough ammunition to survive a third world war.

Some cabinets on the kitchen had some spices or dry herbs already spoiled and destroyed by the ants that had started eating them, the fridge was empty. She hadn't left anything there that could cause too much damage or any disgusting odor as if she knew that she wouldn't be back for a long time.

He took a quick inspection to the material for crafting, some were to process leather or sand bones, lye and tannins, salts, sulfur, some jars full of fats or wax. He made sure to touch everything with a cloth to not leave his fingerprints over her stuff. He could feel Chiyo's curiosity but no trait of nostalgia or interest over them. They meant nothing to him; therefore, they meant nothing to her. He took a big breath before going upstairs.

While the forest outside hid its roots under the Earth, the cabin showed its roots with perversive pride. A variety of antlers different in shape, color and size grew from the ceiling, walls and floors. No trace of actual wood is visible through the bramble. And as the cherry on top of the cake, Will saw he biggest antlers in the room right at the end of the room; its wall left clean of other trophies that could erase it from the picture.

Chalky-white branches contrasted against the splashes and drops of dry blood painting its surface.

He stood before them. A second altar that once saw death.

Chiyo appeared on the corner of his eye, her eyes seemed to shine for the first time since her murder. They shined with pride and wonder; Will assumed that she was seeing her own God impaled on the sharp thorns of the plant where she chose to kill her preys.

'The body of Christ.' Someone whispered on their memories.

'Amen.' They both answered before closing their eyes and opening their mouths to accept the sacramental bread.

She cannibalized the body of her God to find absolution withing it.

On the passing days he found a way to distract himself by fishing, then he started toying with Chiyo's materials, then she started hunting. It was a slow processes cooked at low flame, until it boiled and burned Will's skin revealing her.

She woke up at five to go hunting (she forgot the lake, she only went there to pass the time or to see the families visiting Minnesota, she didn't know how to fish)*, she came back home*

with the new preys leaking blood from their wounds, noses and muzzles, she fray them and left them to dry.

The meat was separated from the bones and left to dry outside as future prey for her friend (because she had a friend, one that likes fishing, and he is a bastard but she likes him enough to let him be around her). *The bones were cooked, washed and dried to be used for powders, charcoals and grist, some of them were turned into knife handles or dream catchers. She liked to make dream catchers, ******** loved them.*

*But she couldn't remember **their** face; she didn't know their hair color or the color of their eyes. She didn't know their name… she didn't know if they were alive or dead, she didn't know anything! They never existed and Will…*

Will woke up one night sweating and crying Chiyo's tears because the person she once loved disappeared completely one day from her memories; he cried for a person he never knew and places he never visited before. He tried to hang on a distorted memory of a widely fabricated person that looked like a combination of skins and parts belonging to the people he had met in his life. His love for them was the only thing that felt real in that moment, he tried to run behind them and hold them so they never left him alone again but it was useless.

Useless, useless, useless. Everything he did was useless.

He was supposed to solve a crime yet he was playing with the ghost of a woman he never met and who had killed many lives.

They spend their days dancing, eating, reading, riding. They had been the best days on her life.

She didn't have to hide or pretend that she wasn't in love with Alana, the world shined bright and there wasn't any other feeling that felt better than having her in her hands. Her soft respiration and the smell of her shampoo in her sheets were part of her morning routines, and there was nothing sweeter in Earth that could compare to the taste of Alana's kisses. She felt like a teenage girl living her first romance, that thought always kept her giggling and smiling; Margot didn't even think she could smile so much for something so simple like being loved, but there she was, head on Alana's thighs and her baby boy sleeping on her chest.

"You'll have to face him some day, Alana." She said softly.

The sound of the music playing in the background mixed with the tone of her voice make the message almost imperceptible.

"Not now. I don't want to see what he has become. If I go I'll end up staying because I will feel guilty." Alana brushed Margot's hair after leaving her book on the side; she had her full attention on the woman lying in her legs.

If she faces him, she will see all the things she can do to help, all the stories she can make and the options she has to offer to a man who doesn't recognize any other path than the one

he has already marked. She can understand Margot's whims, though.

She wants to hold hands in public without everyone thinking they are good friends, to kiss her in front of her colleges and students, pictures in galas and magazine covers where the two of them can show their love. Alana is the price she fought so hard for, who wouldn't want to brag about their triumph? She would be crazy if she didn't admit she wants the same things.

Margot gives her a sensation of desire and hunger she has never experienced before, as if only standing by her side gave her enough power to rule the world. She wants to brag about their love too. Margot is the type of person she wants, she would stand up proudly by her side while Margot talks with everyone at the galas, almost incapable of taking her eyes off of her. She won't deny she even began to develop a little pleasure for exhibitionism when it comes to show everyone their love; her love staring at her with a burning passion or holding her in the need to fuse with Alana, everyone fighting the urge to look at them, as if they were staring at something so private and intimate that could almost be considered taboo.

Alana wants to talk openly about Margot without feeling any remorse about being married to her. She can't do that until she signs the papers. And she won't be able to do that until she talks with Will first.

"You still need to go see him. I can go with you, or if you feel more comfortable, we can bring him here."

"Why the sudden interest on him?"

Margot held her child before she stood up, leaving behind the softness of Alana's body. She looked at her with a serious expression.

"The divorce, Alana. Is now or never."

"Oh, please."

"We can be discreet. No one has to find out. My people knows how to handle a secret."

Alana stood up from the couch. She walked around the room while she thought of a response.

"I don't want to be a secret, Alana."

She stopped walking, her eyes focused on Margot. "You aren't a secret. At least not for Will."

"Oh, so he knows?" She rolled her eyes. "Am I not like a second family for you?"

She is her only family at this point. The dogs might love her, but they love their father more. And Winston. Don't even let her begin about Winston. That dog has become Will's shadow, a protector that will only accept death if Will ever goes away from his life.

Margot and Morgan are all she has. Her family is there, too. But they are so far away, and love for them doesn't feel the same as her love for Margot feels. Sometimes she thinks she can understand the man that loves Will.

There are nights where she can't close her eyes because she is too excited about the idea of being with Margot that all she can do is stare and stare and image how the future by her side will look like. She has tried to go into his mind to understand him.

With her arms hugging her tightly, she imagines herself walking through the forest looking for a victim. Her pace is low and steady, careful not to break the branches and leaves under her feet so the person can't know that a monster is there. When she sees them, she attacks, and she takes home the heart of the poor unfortunate soul… she knows Margot would hide everything, keep the secret and love her still despite the screams and the metallic odor impregnated in her skin.

She imagines doing the same again and again and again and again until Margot gets tired and tiredness becomes fear. And fear becomes paranoia. 'When will I be next? When will be my turn?'

This version of Alana would enjoy of making her mad and drive her crazy until violence is all Margot knows. She would she a glimpse of betrayal and forgiveness in her eyes every time she looks at them. Those glorious green chrysoberyl she has for eyes would shatter under the weight of Alana's hungry heart. She will accept her knife if that means love.

And when she comes back from those images, she feels a kind of guilt that crushes her spirit.

She couldn't do anything like that to Margot. Not to Margot.

Her sweet thing doesn't deserve the fear of living with a killer again.

"He is one of the smartest people I know. Of course he knows. He is just too shy to ask anything."

She went back to her place next to Margot, head resting on her shoulder and a hand caressing Morgan's little head. She pinched his cheek softly to make him smile. Morgan Bloom-Verger. Morgan Verger-Bloom… her son. Some day.

"Winter will be here soon, my dear."

Another year married to Will Graham.

What will the Ripper think if they divorce? Will he spare Alana's and Margot's life? What will Will do?

"I know. Will you really go with me?"

"To the end of the world, love." Margot kisses Alana's forehead.

HOW COULD THEY EVEN COMPREHEND WHAT IT FEELS TO BE WILL GRAHAM?

Since the day he was born they have made him into a toy, a puppet. They stretch him, hit him, and reduced him to nothing because neither of them had anything better to do. Every part of

his body has been torn apart by greedy hands that can never be satisfied, they threw a party around his dried bones and they chew his meat. But they don't swallow him, they find no nourishment in his rotten meat.

Meanwhile, he is at home enjoying the show. What is worst is that he is still out there and Will played a good show for him all along because he had hope that it would have help in some way.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, FUCKING ACTION! Put Will Graham on that shitty stage and make him do some tricks for a psychopathic murderer! He can't say no because his own mind took his mouth away, playing always against him. He is stuck in the body of a man who is the contrary of everything he ever stood for. He is obliged to shake the hand if you ask him. Because he is a «poor victim» like any of those sitting at home shaking in fear of being the next while all he wants to do is bite the hand that feed him.

Fucking good.

This new exhibition exhibits a new kind of animal behind a thick glass, anyone can come inside and look for the moment he decides to snap and attack his caretakers. The public will shout and scream in fear while they watch how he breaks bones and skin, but they won't move because they will be stuck in place recording everything (evidence, they'll say. Another experience soon forgotten. The new tendency going viral everywhere). *Those who swore to keep him safe in his little box will come in with syringes and tranquilizers loaded and ready to put him in a deep sleep from which he will no longer be able to come out.*

"It was wise. He was aggressive."

"He had already tasted human blood. Is probably he would do it again."

"Animals like him are over reactive."

Please… he was nervous and anxious, tired of walking in circles inside a showcase while everyone asked him for new party tricks. During all this time he has done nothing more than watch the new group of visitors take a seat in front of his habitat, they have nuts and popcorn in hand to throw at him if he does something bad. Some of them hit the glass to wake him up if he dares to rest after a long day of working, and even his caretakers take participation in this animalistic rituals that wound him.

He is the bleeding animal in the circus begging for someone to end his agony, wishing upon a star for a savior that can keep him away from them and the images that they are building in his head. He knows he could crush them under his feet and fill his muzzle with their meat, but that is not the kind of animal that he wants to be. Will can be better, so much better than the rest of his species. If only they could leave him in his natural habitat to run free and far away.

Instead, he has to handle their loud sounds, their dirty looks, their pointing fingers, their sharp teeth burrowing in his skin. He is bleeding in the middle of the place and no one does anything to save him because is easier to tell him about a little guy sitting on a cloud or a big guy sitting on a chair in some office.

He tried. He is tired of trying to be the perfect pet and the perfect diversion for those who want something exciting in their lives, but he can't keep going with it.

"Look at this sheet." Why? They are just spots on a white background.

"Write your emotions." He did, and all it got him is a weirdo trying to befriend him.

"Pray before going to sleep." It always ends up in a fight against something that never seems to respond.

"Everything will be better." Better than what? Better than his actual life? Better than his actual self? Does better even exist?

"You have to stand up. Fight for yourself." But he is tired of fighting. THAT IS THE PROBLEM.

Oh, no, please, forgive him for being the way he is! But optimism has never been part of his word repertory.

The audience gathers around his dead carcass to gloat over his suffering, and as if <u>he</u> was Moises walking in the middle of the parted sea, Will can finally meet the eyes of his owner. The eyes of the circus owner. Cold and dry eyes of a man who enjoys the show more than anyone.

"Come and see!" <u>He</u> shouts, big smoke fumaroles come out of <u>his</u> snout. "The beast is dying. We did everything possible to save him, to reintegrate him into society, but some creatures can't be saved. Take a picture and keep this memory forever to remember the destiny of those bad dogs who bite the hand that feeds. Target of cruel laughter, bearer of responsibilities, martyr of lost causes. For shit you are and to shit you will return."

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So what? He is supposed to accept that? To be the fucking character under the lights that everyone can use for their own benefit until he is dry? They use him once and again and again and again and when things go south: he is the one to blame. He is the villain in the story because he is a little aggressive, he is the monster for over reacting and he is the one to blame while those who judged him and poked his ribs can walk away free of any charge.

Jack always kept him on irregular hours, running him through the whole country looking at bodies and murderers only to get a «good job» in return. He placed the lives of others over his shoulders and they used him as a scapegoat to explain their failed cases. The fact of giving Jack the highest number of solved cases never worked in his favor because he wasn't an official agent… THEY WEREN'T HIS FUCKING CASES! ON THAT FUCKING BOARD ISN'T HIS PHOTO BUT JACK'S! AND OF COURSE HIS TEAM KNOWS EVERYTHING IS BECAUSE OF HIM, AND MAYBE JACK RECOGNIZES THAT EVERYTHING HE HAS IS BECAUSE OF WILL BUT WILL HAS NOTHING BECAUSE OF HIS OWN HARD WORK. He pushed and pushed his fucking fist right into Will's anus to control his mouth and actions

like a damn puppet, and when the puppet began to be scary, he left it to rot somewhere far away. HE WASN'T EVEN BLAMED FOR USING WILL ON HIS OWN CONVINIENCE, HE STILL HAS HIS JOB, HIS WIFE, THE RESPECT OF OTHERS.

WILL HAS NOTHING.

Those goddam murderers and stalkers, the serial criminals walking around as if the world belonged to them. Will could stand by the idea that their lives was the result of multiple failures and the imprudence of the world to not offer them a good life and resources, BUT HE IS A BIT OF THEM and he has been containing it, he has been working, he has done everyone's life easier to show that he won't end like them and yet they find the way to drag him into the same shit where they like to drown. So he fought hard against it, he shot and bite, he stuck a finger in their wounds, he crushed their skulls, he left them on the hospital incapable of moving. AND NO ONE CAN SAY THANK YOU FOR SHOWING THAT EVEN TO THE END HE DID THE RIGHT THING. THEY MADE BETS ABOUT WHO WAS THE AGENT WITH MORE SHOT CRIMINALS ON THEIR RECORD, BUT WILL DECIDED TO DO IT AND SUDDENLY IT WAS BAD?

Alana? Alana left him alone since the moment she found out that it would be better to be far away than being his wife. She didn't even handle a year being his wife because her professional interests were stronger than her love. And fine, is okay, he gets it, but she could at least grow some fucking balls to call everything off instead of letting her pity work over her feelings. He doesn't need her to be around to comfort him, he doesn't need her to hug him and fake loving him because she believes that she can use his empathy problems to keep him away from the monster he became. He doesn't need her to change him or save him! WHY IS HE EVEN WAITING FOR HER TO SIGN THE PAPERS? HE COULD JUST PUT AN END TO EVERYTHING, HE COULD KILL HIMSELF AND USE HER OWN EMPATHY AGAINST HER FOR THINKING THAT HE EVEN NEEDED TO BE FIXED.

And Beverly!

Beverly is fine really…

His mother, then! Did she ever really loved him? Did she even wanted to be a mother, or did she just feel forced to be one because that was what was expected of her? Abortions are a thing; pills and hooks exist! Killing him was more merciful than choosing to kill herself because of… why? Why did she even do that? He was a good kid, a little messed up but a good kid.

And his father, his father–

Then the crash came. And the world went black.

He had his first meal on the hospital.

It is winter already.

He can't take his eyes out of Will now that the man looks more relaxed; He rolls his shoulders and cracks His neck to help His body. His little movements and exercises are hypnotic to him, if he could he would reach His neck to apply pressure on His nape, give Him a massage while they wait. In an ideal world, they would find calm in their hugs, he would feel Will's breathing coming down while He tries to fuse into Hannibal with that asphyxiating hold.

The world would stop for them until Will could breathe easier and His mind came at ease. Hannibal wouldn't deny Him any comfort that He may ask for, it wouldn't be wise. But for now, all he can do is stay still and watch Him work His own stress in the best way He knows, learn every single exercise and wait for the right moment to touch Will again.

"Would you believe me if I told you that everything is okay now?" He finally speaks.

"No."

Will lowers his head in acceptance.

"Thanks for taking care of my dogs while I was away."

Hannibal *loved* taking care of His dogs. He got time to look around and inspect every corner of His life in hopes of finding something new or about His past but any evidence of who Will was before He became the man He is today has been forgotten somewhere deep underground. He does have to admit that Will is a very neat person when He isn't submerging Himself in misery.

"Think of it as nothing. I would have kept doing it if something worst had happened to You." Then: "Have you been eating well since You came out of the hospital?"

"As well as I can." Will stares at His own boots and the scratches in them. He plays with the bracelet. "I'm used to it, nothing you should worry about."

"Being used to something doesn't make it any better, Will."

Will gives him a quick inspection before rolling His eyes, once again centering on the floor. He isn't wearing His glasses as He usually does and as much as Hannibal wants to ask about it, he needs to give Will His own space for now.

They remain in a peaceful silence, both of them with their hands on the armrests and their respiration in synchrony.

"I'm not a little kid."

"No one is saying that You are. But You did caused a lot of trouble–"

"*Don't*. Don't say that. I didn't cause any trouble to anyone. If it weren't because of the crash no one would've find out about the file or my situation. I didn't ask for help and I didn't drag anyone with me. In any case, the only person I should ask for forgiveness is you because… I *did* used you."

“You are my friend, Will. You aren’t using me; You’re only relying on me and I *thank You* for that, considering Your hard time asking for help or trusting others. I feel honored.”

Will scoffs. He doesn’t believe it.

“Would You like to have dinner with me after this?”

Some tension comes into His body again, he can notice by the way His chest pops out and the rigid posture that He acquires. It is a no.

“Would it be for my pleasure or your own pleasure?” He says before rejecting him directly.

“I don’t see why we can’t satisfy both requirements.”

“Yeah. Right.” Will scratches the bandages around His arms. The deep cuts must be itching, a good sign that there are healing. “I’m sorry, Doc. But I really think it would be better if I stay at home tonight, alone. These last weeks haven’t been good and I want to be with my dogs. I’m sure all I would like to do is fall into my bed to sleep.”

“I understand. You can’t blame me for trying.”

“May I ask a question?” Hannibal asks after a pause.

“You already did one.” The sarcastic tone sounds precious on Will’s voice.

“A different one.”

Will smirks. Hannibal loves the way His face wrinkles when He does that. “Shoot away, Doctor.”

“Why are You here? This is the last place I imagined You to be, unless it was for a just cause like a case consultation. But since You haven’t been active and You don’t want to talk about Minnesota, I don’t suppose You came to have a real treatment.”

Will seems frozen under the question. Hannibal did asked the same question when the consultation began but it has a different impact now that Will has finally remembered what happened to Him. The bandages on His arm are a reminder too, something He can’t escape. Like this conversation.

Hannibal will ask again and again until Will finally decides to be honest to himself and expose what is going on in His mind, and all Hannibal can do is wait patiently for Him. Is not like he doesn’t know about His movements, the visits to the ware house, the cabin and the lake, but he made a promise of not visiting Minnesota ever again unless it was for a good cause so there is no way of knowing *what happened* in there.

“Is punishment.” He answers sharply.

“For what You did in Minnesota?”

“For what I have done my whole life.” He licks His teeth. Hannibal holds his breath while He does it. “I ruined many people’s lives and now I have to face the consequences of calling a monster into life.”

The people being both His victims and Hannibal’s stock. The monster being Will and Hannibal. Intertwined by the same phrase. *Similar.*

“You had nothing to do with their deaths, Will. Don’t hold Yourself responsible of a senseless man’s work.”

“That is easy to say. Not to do. Not when you live in my head. I find pleasure in things others wouldn’t, I feel attracted to his actions and his persona. And, even if I meant no harm with my book, I inspired war. Someone has to pay for all of it until the sun doesn’t touch his skin ever again.”

Dead or behind bars. Buried or in a confinement.

Hannibal sighs at the image of both ends of his destiny, wherever he looks at, all he can see is Will returning or staying with him.

They die together to make sure neither beast or hunter can hurt anyone again.

Will returning to his enclosure every now and again for the thrill of danger that Hannibal awakes in Him.

He will go to the place where Hannibal will be buried, flowers in hand.

They’ll talk to each other through the bars of their enclosure, and they’ll watch the place burn with chaos.

He can’t wait for it to happen.

“Well then, if we aren’t talking about *what happened* in Minnesota, then we can talk about *what didn’t happened* there.”

“Won’t ask me why?”

He doesn’t need to know why Minnesota of all places, he knows why. He told Him to go there.

“Will You tell me why?”

Will let’s His head fall down, another way of Him to say «no». Of course He won’t.

“Last year I felt shitty.” He starts. “I was depressed, and it got bad, *really bad*. Tried to kill myself because I was afraid of falling down again through the rabbit hole. Alana came into my office and interrupted the whole show, to be honest I don’t think she knows about it but till this day… a part of me is mad at her for doing that.”

“And the other part?”

“Is relieved that she came into my office. Because I got to see *him* again.” He takes a long pause. “Last year feels like a distant dream compared to what I happened this year, trying to kill myself sounds so surreal I don't even see that memory as mine.”

“What have You discovered this year that didn’t happened before?”

“Meaning. I still don’t like the idea of becoming someone I’m not, but when I saw Anthony I felt as if that was the place where I was supposed to be and *who* I was supposed to be. I used to feel disgust or shock before, when working to other cases… this is too passionate to even feel like that. Feels like meditation.”

“Passion’s good. Gets blood pumping.”

“Not when that passion is correlated to a serial killer who is too *passionate* about me.”

“Was it passion what led You to crash Your car?”

“It was anger. Passion, though, was what led me to Minnesota. I went fishing, then hunting…” His eyes narrow, his posture change. Will stops being Will and Hannibal is enchanted by the quick change in his appearance. This man right in front of him looks like an animal ready to hunt. “I don’t enjoy hunting as much as I enjoy fishing. But once I started I couldn’t stop. It felt natural, like a second skin. I couldn’t stop imagining what Tsubame felt when she was doing the same to her victims, or if he ever did the same with her.”

Will sight gets lost in the distance as many times before. He is remembering, going into His unconscious like He does when He is in a crime scene, but this time, He looks happier. Enamored by some crude violence that is foreign to His life but feels so close at the same time. Something that has Him aching for more.

“Hunting for sport.”

“Hunting for fun. Passion.” Will corrects him; He returns to the present, the shock of change startles Him for a bit, then it disappears.

“You were joyous living on her skin.”

“Yes.” Will smiles at the crumbs of a memory fading away from His imagination.

“And You are using this moment to punish Yourself for the joy You felt?”

“Nasty joy.”

“Will, there is only joy. You shouldn’t feel remorse for the way You act. Wearing someone else’s clothes doesn’t make them Yours, only Your skin belongs to You and it will accompany You until the end. You came to this world naked and You’ll leave it naked. The fact that You have interest for the macabre impregnated on Your skin should be appreciated. It is all part of You.”

“Well, *that* joy is exactly the reason why I am this way and why I prefer to be alone.”

“You are alone because You are unique. Your mind works in ways that others can’t comprehend but that doesn’t make You inherently wrong nor evil. It makes them stupid.” Will stares at him, eyes completely locked in the man who never turns his gaze away from Him. He doesn’t have anything else to add so Hannibal continues the conversation. “Do You remember how You got into Your car?”

He shakes His head, brown curls dancing one way and another. “All I remember was hunting, at first I thought that I might have drank a bit too much, and then I crashed. Completely blacked out. The alcohol in my system wasn’t high enough to cause that, so I’m suspecting that dissociation may be a good explanation for it.”

“I can imagine. Your body has been handling a high level of stress, you have been functioning correctly all day because you were supposed to do that but now that You were is a save place there was no more reason to pretend to be okay.” Hannibal stands up and Will follows for some reason. They walk to his desk where he keeps some business cards, he gives Will one of them. Personal drivers services. Will examines the card but He doesn’t say anything. “Children often tend to show themselves as well-behaved kids until their mothers come. They know that their mother is their safe place, therefore, they are the only place where they can let their tantrums out because they know that their mother will understand their emotions.”

“‘M not a kid.” He repeats as before.

Hannibal sits on his chair; Will sits on the desk. Legs almost brushing. He has to raise his head to look Him in the eyes, his God looks down at him with a soft expression that feels almost merciful and loving. He swallows hard, whishing Will can’t notice how nervous and stupid He makes him feel, when it comes to Will he can’t help but break character every now and then. But how could he keep composure when divinity is so close to him?

“Not saying that you are. This behavior is more common amongst adults than you think. There are certain places and certain people that make us feel calmed enough to let our emotions flow, that is why You chose to have a breakdown there and not in public. Because that is Your safe place. A place were pretending being You or Tsubame didn’t feel wrong or blameful.”

“So, what’s your professional suggestion, Doctor?” Will crosses His arms over His chest. Hannibal wants to kiss the perfect bow drawn on His forehead by His brow, he wants to caress the wrinkles showing in the corners on his eyes. One day, the sad smirk on His mouth will disappear, and Hannibal will do *anything* to never let it show again.

“You let me take You home first. Then we can discuss what to do with You.”

Chapter End Notes

I had to write more about Margot and Alana, I love them when they are together. I'll make sure to do more about them having the happy life they deserve.
And I also wanted to torture that poor, pitiful, sexy man named Will Graham.

Bye-bye~

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